

Silence + Solitude: Part 3

SCRIPTURE



MISSIONAL COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

READ THIS TOGETHER

When we enter into silence and solitude, our desire is to be with Jesus and make space to hear His voice more clearly. As we saw earlier, silence and solitude are container disciplines that create space for us to engage in other practices like prayer and Scripture reading. One of the primary ways we will “be with Jesus” in silence and solitude is through meeting Him in Scripture. Jesus, the Word made flesh, has given His Scriptures through which He speaks to us.

When we come to meet with God in His Word during silence and solitude, we must be careful that our primary aim is to know God and be with Him; not merely to gain information. Richard Rohr writes, “Our desire to know more, read more, and study more can be another expression of our culture and its acquisitive nature. Knowing God, not knowing more, is the goal.” We can easily approach Scripture with the goal of gaining knowledge and knowing more, but without a desire to know God. Filling our minds with more truth, but not submitting to God in the process is incredibly dangerous. It’s possible for Scripture reading to become a way of “doing something” so that we don’t make space to actually “be with Jesus.”

Correctly understanding and interpreting Scripture matters. We must be careful not to impose our own meaning or ideas on Scripture. But, scripture reading during silence and solitude is not meant to be a Bible study (another practice we’ll learn more about in the coming months). Instead this is a time to read Scripture in a personal way with the intent of meeting God in the process. We recommend beginning your time of silence and solitude with slow, prayerful Scripture reading while listening to God and what He might say to you in the moment.

German pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident Dietrich Bonhoefer wrote, *“Just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all. That is meditation.”* This way of meditating on Scripture has been practiced by Christians for centuries. Often referred to as “Lectio Divina” or “Divine Reading”, this practice of Scripture reading “invites us into God’s presence to listen to His particular, loving word to me at this particular moment in time.” (Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*) cont...

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The first 1,500 years of church history were characterized by this kind of Scripture reading. Because most people did not have their own personal Bible or could not read, they relied on learning to listen to Scripture read with an ear bent toward hearing from God. While we can, and should, take time to study our own Bible; we can benefit from this ancient practice of learning to hear Scripture and receive it as God's specific Word for us in that moment.

Jesus told His disciples, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (Jn. 15:7) For us to learn to abide in Jesus, His words must abide in us. We are invited to let His words abide in us through the practice of personal, devotional reading and meditation on Scripture as we meet with Him in our silence and solitude.

Questions for Missional Community Discussion

How do you currently engage with Scripture throughout the week? (How often do you usually engage with it? Do you follow a Bible reading plan? (It's okay if you're not where you think you should be. No one is here to make you feel bad, but to support you in this.)

How would you characterize the primary way you tend to read Scripture? What has shaped you the most in this?

How is reading Scripture different than any other book?

How has God used Scripture to personally meet you in some way in the past?

Practice Lectio Divina Together

Take time to practice Lectio Divina together before you go and try it on your own this week. Using the steps for Lectio Divina outlined in the "Individual Practice" section below, open your Bibles together to John 1:9-13 and work through the steps together. For your three readings of the passage, pick three different people to read the passage out loud for your community. During each step, briefly read the instructions for the step, have someone read the passage, and give a few minutes for the group to sit in silence and meditate on the Word. Close your time praying together and thank God for meeting you in His Word.

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INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE

Lectio Divina

The goal of this individual practice is to help you learn to read Scripture not primarily as study, but as a way to meet God and hear from Him in silence and solitude. The method, called Lectio Divina, was developed by Christians in the early church and has been used for centuries.

This week, find 20-30 minutes you can spend in silence and solitude. If you want to try even longer, that's great! If you can try this more than once, go for it. Remember, it's not about passing or failing. God is inviting you to be with Him. Turn off your phone (or put it in airplane mode), set a timer, and find a quiet place to settle in.

Before you start your time, pick the passage of Scripture you will meditate on. It's helpful to pick this beforehand so that you are not spending your time trying to figure this out. If you're not sure what to read, start with a Psalm or a Gospel passage. If you have a Bible reading plan, select one of the daily passages. Just remember your goal in this specific practice is not to consume a lot of text, but to read slowly and devotionally through a short passage.

Here's the process of Lectio Divina as outlined by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun in the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*:

1. Silencio- Silence. Come into God's presence, slow down, relax, and intentionally release the chaos and noise in your mind to Him. Take a few minutes to settle into this silence. As internal noise (anxiety, anger, fear) rises in your heart, entrust it to our Father. Ask Him to open your eyes and speak through His Word.

2. Lectio- Read the Word. Read a Scripture passage slowly and out loud, lingering over the words so that they resonate in your heart. When a word or phrase catches your attention, don't keep reading. Stop and attend to what God is saying to you. Be open to the word. Don't analyze it or judge it. Listen and wait.

cont...

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INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE

Lectio Divina

Meditatio- Meditate. Read the Scripture a second time out loud. Savor the words. Listen for any invitation that God is extending to you through this passage. Reflect on the importance of the words that light up to you. Like Mary, who pondered the word in her heart, gently explore the implications of God's invitation."

Oratio- Respond, Pray. Read the Scripture a third time out loud. Now is the moment to enter into a personal dialogue with God. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The important thing is to respond truthfully and authentically. What feelings has the text stirred in you? Name where you are resistant or want to push back. Become aware of where you feel invited into a deeper way of being with God. Talk to God about these feelings. If you didn't sense anything or nothing stood out to you, that's okay. (It may take a time or two for you to become comfortable approaching Scripture this way.) Talk to God about that too.

Contemplatio- Contemplate, Rest, and Wait in the Presence of God. Allow some time for the word to sink deeply into your soul. Yield and surrender yourself to God. Before you leave this time, you might consider a reminder that can help you dwell on or incarnate the word or phrase God gave you throughout the remainder of your day.

When you have finished, thank God for giving His Word and His presence to you. If there's anything you want to contemplate throughout the day, write it down. Consider who you might share this with, whether your DNA group, spouse, children, or someone else.

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DNA OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

After you have tried the individual practice, find time to meet with your DNA group and reflect together on your experience meditating on Scripture during silence and solitude and trying Lectio Divina. Let the conversation go wherever God leads, but here are some questions that might be helpful.

When you approached this exercise, how were you feeling? Were you skeptical? Nervous? Excited? Why do you think that was?

Share a little about your experience. What passage did you meditate on? What specific part(s) of the passage did God draw your heart and mind to? Was there a phrase or word that God pressed into your heart?

Did God speak to you in any specific way through that time? (Its okay if He didn't. Being with Him is enough.)

Compare the practice of Lectio Divina that you experienced with your MC with the experience of doing it on your own. How was it different? Which did you prefer? Why do you think that is?

Reflect on your experiences of silence and solitude over the past few weeks; what have you noticed?

Do you see God forming this spiritual muscle in you?

Does this practice seem to impact your daily life?
If so, in what ways?

How will you make this a regular practice in your life?