

Solitude & Silence 01

The Secret Place



Weston Brooks

THE SECRET PLACE

Whoever dwells in the secret place of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty..

- Psalm 91:1

Solitude is not a private, therapeutic place - it is the place of encounter.

- Henri Nouwen

The two primary places we discover God are in community – in deep, long- term, loving relationships with other followers of Jesus in the family of God – and in solitude, silence, and stillness. You see this pattern in the life of Jesus himself. He spent time with people in loving relationship and then He would regularly slip away in solitude to pray. The biblical term can be translated “the desert” or “the deserted place” or “the solitary place” or even “the quiet place” or “the secret place.”

The Secret Place is not just a quiet room or geographic location, it is a realm in which it is just you and God alone together. It is that place where you separate yourself from other people and all distractions. You are cut off from what other people see about you and from what other people think about you. It is just you, your thoughts and feelings, and God.

John Mark Comer said that “solitude is both a place and a practice.” In other words, solitude is a place we go to be with God. And it is also a discipline that we must schedule time for and then keep the commitment we made to do it.

The primary goal this week is to develop a consistent time of solitude (30 minutes) every day. If it is not already a regular practice then you may find it difficult. However, with practice and consistency you will likely find that it is the best part of your day! As Tyler Staton said, “If you began a practice of daily sitting in contemplative silence for two minutes, it won’t feel good, for an extended period of time. And then it will become so sacred that you can’t imagine how you ever prayed without it.”

A FEW TIPS

The goal this week is to spend 30 minutes each day in solitude. I really encourage you to do this every day. This is an exercise whose dividends are greatest when you do it repeatedly and consistently.

Here are a few tips:

Carve out time

If you wait until you have free time or more time to practice solitude, then you never will. The whole point of the practice of solitude is for you to make a conscious decision and discipline yourself to set aside time for solitude.

Don't try to be heroic about it

Start small. Although we will ask you to practice a longer period of solitude by the end of this practice, do not put pressure on yourself to start there. At this point, daily consistency with smaller amounts of time is more important.

Solitude is a practice of abstinence

It is not about what you do, but about what you do not do. The only thing you are doing is not doing anything to distract yourself.

Release any demand to experience anything

It is like falling asleep. The harder you try to fall asleep, the less likely you are. There are certain things that can come to you, but you cannot make it happen. Solitude is not about making anything happen, it is about making space for God to come to you.

THE PRACTICE OF SOLITUDE

Find a quiet place in your home or outside in nature that is as distraction-free as possible. Do not bring anything with you except a Bible and journal. Make sure your phone (and any other device or possible distraction) is not with you, but in a different room.

Start with breathe prayer

- from Prayer Practice 04 - Being with God, page 5
- Also in this guide's Appendix

If your mind is taking this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to-dos, and distractions, don't worry about it. Quickly write down any thoughts and bring your thoughts back to God.

Rest in God's love

- Once you feel "quieted," spend a few minutes just resting in God's love for you.
- Let the Holy Spirit make his presence known to you – body, soul and spirit. Just soak in his love and peace and joy. Let God love you.
- You may want to listen for God's voice and see what comes to mind.
- Or you may want to worship and express your love to God in your own way.
- Don't try to make anything happen or control the experience – just be with God.

Read a Scripture

- After a few minutes, continue your time in solitude by praying a psalm or reading a story from the Gospels or a passage from Scripture. Or by praying over your life. Or by journaling to God. Follow your heart.

Simple Prayer

- Close your time with a simple prayer of gratitude to God for his presence, love, and goodness in your life.

Reflect

- By the end of the week, spend some time reflecting on your experience of solitude

APPENDIX

BREATHE PRAYER

"Let your memory of Jesus combine with your breath - then you will know the profit of silence." - St. John Climacus

In Hebrew the word for spirit and the word for breathe are the same word - for breathe represents life - and so the Spirit of God is like the breathe of God giving life. Since the 3rd century, Christians have used the God-ordained process of breathing to attune themselves to God's Spirit and presence. Modern science has caught up and shown that deep, slow breathing calms your nervous system and helps center your mind. Try the following:

- Find a quiet place to pray and sit in an attentive, but comfortable posture
- Breathe deep and slowly (at least 5 seconds inhale / 5 seconds exhale)
- Relax, become present in the moment and then open your mind to God
- Combine a word or phrase with your breathing, repeating it as you breathe. Or focus on a mental action with each breathe cycle. For example:
 - "Lord Jesus Christ" (inhale); "have mercy on me" (exhale)
 - "The Lord is my Shepherd" (inhale); "I shall not want" (exhale)
 - "In Christ alone" (inhale); "my soul finds rest" (exhale)
- Breathe in the peace of Christ... Breathe out worry, fear, anger, guilt, or shame.
- Breathe in Christ's love... Breathe out his love for another person

RESOURCES

An Invitation to Solitude and Silence

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