

Solitude & Silence 03

Resistance: Facing Our Enemies



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INTRODUCTION

We are silent in the early hours of each day, because God is supposed to have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep, because to God also belongs the last word.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Solitude and Silence, or what is often called contemplative prayer is not about doing but about *being* with God. Contemplation is about meditation and engaging with your thoughts in the presence of God. The mystics described contemplation as descending with the mind into the heart and standing there in the presence of God.

Silence is not about making your mind go blank. It is impossible to literally and completely shut off your mind. However, there is a difference between your mind at peace, able to slow down, be still and be fully in God's presence and your mind being distracted with what some call "mind chatter" - the continual bombardment of thoughts, often random and chaotic.

The inability to "be still and know that I am God" is generally the result of our soul's three enemies (the world, the flesh and the devil) conspiring to keep us from being with God and hearing His word and wisdom to us. And so, the practice of Solitude and Silence will help you face these enemies while in God's presence. This is spiritual warfare.

With practice and consistency, God will graciously meet you and His grace will strengthen you. Through the Spirit and the Scriptures, God will help you sort through your thoughts, identifying their true source so that you can receive grace and power through the true word of God while dismissing those thoughts from the world, the flesh or the devil.

You will come out of Solitude in the power of the Holy Spirit just as Jesus did.

A FEW TIPS

Here are a few tips to help you establish the practice of solitude and silence.

Be Intentional

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.

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. Daily consistency with smaller amounts of time is most important at this point.

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.

Thought life

Contemplation is not trying to force yourself to think about God. Contemplation is about letting go of our mental preoccupation and resting in the presence of God. Don't get down on yourself or give up just because you have a lot of "mind chatter." Just discipline yourself to stay in solitude and silence and gently bring your thoughts back to God.

THE PRACTICE OF SOLITUDE

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

This week we are going to return to Lectio Divina from week #3 in our Practice of Prayer. I also encourage you to set aside 1 day as a digital sabbath (see page 6).

Daily Routine

Start with breathe prayer

- as described in the Appendix

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, peace and joy. Let God love you.
- Don't try to make anything happen or control the experience – just be with God.

Lectio Divina

- Read a passage or paragraph of Scripture using Lectio Divina (review page 4 and 5 of this guide for instructions)

Write

- Record any thoughts or insights from the Lord

Gratitude

- Close your time with gratitude for God's presence and love

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is latin for “divine reading.” It is an ancient practice of slowly reading Scripture as you prayerfully look for God’s word to you. It was first written about by Origen, an early church leader born in the 2nd century. It became a regular practice in the monastic orders from the 6th century onward and is still a popular practice within the contemplative tradition of Christianity.

The practice of Lectio Divina follows the following structure:

- Read** Read a passage of Scripture (select a passage from the list on the next page). Read it slowly and prayerfully. Look for when a word, phrase, idea or emotion stands out to you.
- Reflect** Pause and meditate on what stands out. What about it is drawing your attention. Why is it resonating with you? Why the emotion?
- Respond** Now invite God into your meditation. Talk to Him about your reaction, thoughts or feelings. Ask Him for additional insights.
- Rest** Take a few minutes to stop thinking and talking and just rest in God’s love and His word to you.

This week we encourage you to write down a few thoughts during the Respond portion of Lectio Divina each day

LECTIO DIVINA READINGS

Select a passage from the following list

or use the Lectio 365 app from 24/7 Prayer

1 Samuel 30:1-6

2 Kings 6:8-17

Psalm 1

Psalm 13,

Psalm 23

Psalm 27

Psalm 34

Psalm 42

Psalm 46

Psalm 51

Psalm 61

Psalm 63

Psalm 73

Psalm 121

Psalm 139

Psalm 145

Isaiah 40, 43

Jeremiah: 1:4-10

Jeremiah 17-19

Jeremiah 15:10-21

Jeremiah 18:1-6

Matthew 3:13-17

Matthew 11: 25-30

Matthew 17:1-13

Mark 1:14-20

Mark 4:35-41

Luke 1:26-38

Luke 5:1-11

Luke 9:57-60

Luke 12:49-53

Luke 7:36-50

Luke 22:24-34

John 1:35-51

John 5:1-20

John 14

John 15

John 16

John 17

1 Corinthians 13

Ephesians 1:3-10

Colossians 1: 5-20

Hebrews 1:1-4

1 John 3:1-3

Revelation 1:9-19

DIGITAL SABBATH

We are part of the first generation of disciples to follow Jesus in the digital age. And while there are some wonderful benefits of technology to embrace and celebrate, it is increasingly obvious that there are also some serious negative effects on our inner life with God. One of the spiritual disciplines we should add in our day is a digital sabbath: As one pastor observed:

Many people have found that one of the most helpful disciplines for our era is a digital Sabbath – one full day a week when all your devices, including your smartphone, are powered fully off. Even doctors are beginning to recommend this practice, simply for the health of your central nervous system. How much more so for us who desire to experience God's nearness in our everyday life?

- John Mark Comer

So go ahead and try it. Select one day this week in which you will turn off all your digital devices – yes, including your phone! If you think you cannot go a day without your phone, think of this: until a mere 15 years ago, all humans spent their entire lives without a smartphone! Yes, you can survive one day without it.

Turn off your phone, computer, tablet, gaming station and TV for one day. Do not put your phone in your pocket or purse or carry it with you. Every time you have the urge to find or look at your phone, computer, or TV, instead, take a minute or two to just be silent in God's presence.

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 breath. 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

Extended Solitude

Remember, the goal is to spend an entire day in solitude and silence by the end of this practice in a few weeks. I recommend you start planning now so that you can schedule your day and make any necessary arrangements.

Although you could do an extended day of solitude and silence at home, I highly recommend you get out of your house. The main reason is distractions. If you remain home, you have all kinds of distractions readily available and it will be virtually impossible for you to resist them.

The goal is to put yourself in a place where it is just you, your thoughts and God. Do not bring any music or books or anything else that could distract you. Especially do not bring your phone! If you are genuinely too nervous to leave your home without your phone, then at least turn your phone off and lock it in your glove compartment. Do not look at or touch your phone unless you are in a genuine emergency. You may bring your Bible and a journal. But that is all!

You have many options for how you do your day of Solitude. Parks, beaches, nature trails, retreat centers, a christian camp, botanical gardens or even a friend's home who will leave you alone for the day all provide great spaces for solitude.

In summary:

1. Pick a date and schedule it in your calendar
2. Determine your timeframe. I recommend a minimum of 6-8 hours
3. Choose your location

RESOURCES

An Invitation to Solitude and Silence

by Ruth Haley Barton

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www.rolcf.net