

Solitude & Silence 04

Resistance: Facing Our Trials



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INTRODUCTION

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

- Jesus (Gospel of John 16:33)

Arthur Schopenhauer was a German philosopher of what is often called "philosophical pessimism." He thought that life was bleak and that if we were rational we would never have children so as to spare them the burden of existence. He wrote, "Today is bad, and day by day it will get worse - until at last the worst of all arrives." Sort of the original version of "life is hard and then you die" attitude.

The Biblical perspective is not just the optimistic opposite, "life is easy and then you go to heaven." Jesus did not say, "Follow Me and all your troubles will disappear." While the biblical authors recognize the difficulty of life, they believe true wisdom is found by trusting in God's wisdom and goodness no matter what your circumstance. This is one of the main themes in the Book of James. The **Bible Project** summarizes this amazing New Testament book in this way:

He believes that life's trials and hardships are paradoxical gifts that can produce endurance and shape our character. God can work on us in the midst of suffering to help us become "perfect and complete." This word "perfect" refers to wholeness. In this context, it means living a completely integrated life in which your actions are consistent with the values and beliefs you learned from Jesus. James knows that most of us live as fractured people with large inconsistencies in our character. All of us are more compromised than we'd like to admit, but God is on a mission to restore fractured people and make them whole.

John Ortberg summarizes the **Book of James** this way, "when something bad is happening to you, something good can be happening in you."

Solitude is the place where we find God's peace, strength and joy in the midst of life's many problems. It is the place to let our pain, frustrations, and questions arise before God and allow God to speak to our minds and hearts - bringing clarity, perspective and energy - so we may grow in love no matter the circumstance.

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 continue Lectio Divina this week using the Book of James. This aim this week is to consider our attitude and character in the midst of life's problems as we sit in the presence of the Lord.

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, paragraph or chapter from **James** using Lectio Divina (review page 4 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 (from the Book of James). 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

REFLECTION

Reflect

How did your practice of solitude go this week? Where did you experience resistance in solitude? In what ways did you encounter God in 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 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

RESOURCES

An Invitation to Solitude and Silence

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