

Solitude & Silence 02

Resistance: Facing Ourselves



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INTRODUCTION

Man likes to travel, create, make great discoveries. But he remains outside of himself, far from God, who is silently in his soul ... There is no place on earth where God is more present than in the human heart. This heart truly is God's abode, the temple of silence ... The Father waits for his children in their own hearts."

– Robert Cardinal Sarah

As Henri Nouwen said, "Solitude is not a private, therapeutic place - it is the place of encounter." In order to encounter God we must also encounter ourselves. In solitude and silence you can get away from people and every distraction, but you cannot get away from your self.

Waiting is an important part of encountering God. Think of visiting the doctor. You may have an appointment at his/her office, but you still have to wait for the doctor to come to you personally. You might get frustrated that the doctor is taking longer than you want. But if you leave the waiting room because of your impatience, you are the one who misses out on getting what you need from the doctor.

Being in God's waiting room can be a place of preparation for your encounter. Elijah sought to meet with God when he crashed spiritually (read the story in 1 Kings 19). He had a long time in solitude before God came to him. It gave him opportunity to rest and to feel the full force of his emotional exhaustion. Waiting on God gives you the opportunity to experience your own soul and heart at the deepest levels.

We can miss how important it is to bring our true self (the good, the bad and the ugly) to God. It takes both courage and trust. As Ruth Haley Barton says, "waiting is about becoming safe enough with God that we are no longer defending ourselves or hiding ourselves in His presence." This does not happen quickly, but over longer periods of time.

When God finally did show up to Elijah, He asked a simple, yet profound question. "Why are you here, Elijah?" Elijah's time of waiting helped him give the unvarnished and true answer. Through this encounter, God ministered to and strengthened Elijah so that he could return from solitude with renewed vision and purpose.

A FEW TIPS

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

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 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.

The practice this week is similar to last week with the added step of paying attention to and naming your emotions.

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.

Let yourself feel

- Pay attention to how you are feeling. Not just on the surface, but deep down.
- Do not run from them. Turn and face them and allow them to roll over you.
- Try to put a name to what you are feeling. Use the list of emotions in the Appendix if that helps. Choose a few words that help you express how you are feeling

Pray the prayer of surrender

- Give God your *emotions* by expressing how you feel with honesty and no filters
- Give God your *desires* by telling Him what you want
- Give God your *trust* by surrendering your heart and circumstances to Him. Pray Jesus' prayer "not my will, but Your will be done."
- Receive grace and love from God

Gratitude

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

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

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

APPENDIX

List of Emotions

| Happy | Sad | Angry | Scared | Confused |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Admired | Alienated | Abused | Afraid | Ambivalent |
| Alive | Ashamed | Aggravated | Alarmed | Awkward |
| Appreciated | Burdened | Agitated | Anxious | Baffled |
| Assured | Condemned | Anguished | Appalled | Bewildered |
| Cheerful | Crushed | Annoyed | Apprehensive | Bothered |
| Confident | Defeated | Betrayed | Awed | Constricted |
| Content | Dejected | Cheated | Concerned | Directionless |
| Delighted | Demoralized | Coerced | Defensive | Disorganized |
| Determined | Depressed | Controlled | Desperate | Distracted |
| Estatic | Deserted | Deceived | Doubtful | Doubtful |
| Elated | Despised | Disgusted | Fearful | Flustered |
| Encouraged | Devastated | Dismayed | Frantic | Foggy |
| Energized | Disappointed | Displeased | Full of Dread | Hesitant |
| Enthusiastic | Discarded | Dominated | Guarded | Immobilized |
| Excited | Discouraged | Enraged | Horrified | Misunderstood |
| Exuberant | Disgraced | Exasperated | Impatient | Perplexed |
| Flattered | Disheartened | Exploited | Insecure | Puzzled |
| Fortunate | Disillusioned | Frustrated | Intimidated | Stagnant |
| Fulfilled | Dismal | Fuming | Nervous | Surprised |

RESOURCES

An Invitation to Solitude and Silence

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