

PRACTICING THE DISCIPLINES OF SOLITUDE & SILENCE:

Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us
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Read for further understanding about the practices of solitude and silence and spend time answering the reflection questions. The challenge this week is to try one of the spiritual exercises.

DEFINITION:

The practice of solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God. Solitude is a “container discipline” for the practice of other disciplines. Silence is a regenerative practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise. Silence provides freedom from speaking as well as from listening to words or music.

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT OF SOLITUDE & SILENCE:

- freedom from the need to be occupied and stimulated
- moving away from letting the world squeeze you into its mold
- liberation from constantly living your life in reference to other people
- quieting the internal noise so you can better listen to God
- giving yourself time and space to internalize what you already know
- speaking only what you hear from God rather than out of your store of opinions
- freedom from negative habits of speech (deception, gossip, impulsive chatter, small talk, impression management, the need to express your opinion or critique)
- receiving quiet from the chaos and the noise in your life
- having deeper intimacy with God
- developing increased listening skills

SOME HELPFUL SCRIPTURES:

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

Mark 1:35

“The Lord said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.’”

1 Kings 19:11

“Let him sit alone in silence for the Lord has laid it on him.”

Lamentations 3:28

“Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

Luke 5:15-16

REFLECTION QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. How and when do you resist or avoid being alone? Being silent?
2. What tends to pop into your mind when you are alone? What do you resort to doing?
3. When have you felt most comfortable being alone? Most uncomfortable?
4. What sense of God do you have when you are alone? When you are silent?
5. How much time each day do you give to silence (i.e. no words, printed or audible)?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES: (choose one to try this week)

1. In a place where you can't be interrupted, intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Recognize that the Lord is as near as your own breathing. Inhale God's breath of life; exhale all that weighs on you. Simply be alone with God. When it is time to return to others, leave the presence of God gently. Carry the sense of being alone with God with you into the next thing.
2. Spend 15 minutes or more alone with God. You can do an activity if you wish: walk, run, drive, iron. Dedicate the time ahead of you to God. After the time is up, consider how it was for you to be alone with God. Was it hard? Good? Did God speak to you in any way?
3. Make the time you spend in the shower each morning your alone time with God. Present yourself to your Creator—all of your body, all the dirt that has accumulated in your soul, all that God has made you to be. Let the water from the shower remind you of the water of life that nourishes and changes you. Let the warmth touch you with love. Offer yourself to God for the day. Thank him for the alone time he spends with you.
4. If silence is new for you, begin with 10 minutes. Setting a timer lets you forget the time and settle into the quiet. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God and become quiet. What do you hear: voices, traffic, your breath, wind, your heart, distracting thoughts? Let the noise go. Continue to let the quiet deepen. Be with God. After ten minutes, reflect on what it was like for you to simply become still enough to hear the background. Try this several times a day. What happens to you? Then benefits of being silent are often seen in the fruit it bears, rather than in the experience of silence per se.
5. Go into silence, placing yourself in the presence of God with the words "Here I am." As distractions come to mind, let them go by imagining they are boats floating down a river of God's peace. Let the current take the distractions away. Don't follow the distractions. Gently return to God repeating, "Here I am." Let the current of God's Spirit carry you. What is this like for you?