

LIFE with Jesus in Worship

Solitude

INTRODUCTION

Watch a movie or read a book set in years past and something will strike you.

You might find a person walking by a stream in the woods, fishing on a dock by the water, walking through an empty field, or curled up by a window watching the rain. What is remarkable to us about these quiet scenes is that these people are experiencing uninterrupted solitude. They are simply quiet with their thoughts, with God, with nature, or with themselves—because they don't have a smartphone anywhere nearby.

Doesn't even thinking of these scenes give you a sense of longing, an ache for a simpler time?

The loss of quiet and solitude in our century has been wounding to our souls and to our relationship to God.

We are what Andrew Sullivan calls the "frazzled digital generation."

John Mark Comer puts it like this: "This new normal of digital distraction is robbing us of the ability to be present. Present to God. Present to other people. Present to all that is good, beautiful, and true in our world. Even present to our own souls."

We suffer from our constantly fragmented attention: we are frazzled and anxious, and we feel distant from one another and from God.

But Jesus invites us into a practice that can help to heal us.

Perhaps the most noticeable practice of Jesus in the Gospels is His commitment to solitude.

Before He begins His ministry, He spends *forty days* in solitude in the wilderness. The next three years of His active ministry are continually accented by His retreating alone. Luke summarizes it like this: "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed," Luke 5:16.

In solitude Jesus connected deeply with His Father; solitude helped Him draw His identity and direction from God and not from the people or culture around Him. And it made Him spiritually strong enough to resist the temptations of the devil.¹

If Jesus needed solitude for grounding and spiritual strength, how much more do we? Mature believers through all the ages have taught that solitude is the most important spiritual practice.

¹ Matthew 4

In solitude we become aware of the presence of God. He communicates His love, power, goodness, and love primarily in silence and solitude. “Be still,” He says, “and know that I am God.”²

In solitude we also become aware of ourselves—our sorrows and fears, our hopes and dreams, and our longings. This aspect of solitude tempts us avoid it sometimes; we are reluctant or afraid to feel the things inside of us. We find it less painful or frightening to remain distracted. But that’s not really living; it’s numbing out.

We can only live, really live—and know God deeply—through the practice of solitude.

Solitude is not just being by ourselves. It’s an intentional practice of separating ourselves from people, technology, and the world *in order to be attentive to God and to our own souls*.

We won’t grow in intimacy with God without it. Solitude is the “container practice” for all the other practices³: we cannot pray, hear from God, confess sin, or meditate upon Scripture without first creating intentional solitude.

THE PRACTICE

For twenty-first century Christians, practicing solitude can be difficult at first. It’s something we need to practice. Be patient with yourself, but don’t give up!

It can be helpful to start small and build.

- **Guard the “little solitudes”⁴ you already have in your day.**

Begin by noticing and refusing to fill the small spaces of solitude you already have in your life.

- Intentionally turn off the music or other sound in your car. Practice sitting quietly at stoplights or on commutes. Turn your awareness to God during these quiet moments.
- Get up a few minutes early for fifteen minutes of solitude before you eat breakfast or leave for work.
- Leave your phone at home when you walk your dog. Pay attention to the beauty of nature and talk to God about what you see.

- **Boundary your technology**

- Notice how often you reach for your phone to fill small empty spaces in your day. Practice abstaining from this by checking messages or emails only at predetermined times.
- Turn off notifications for as many things as possible on your phone. This is really important!
- Practice leaving your phone in another room or at home when you seek solitude.

- **Set aside time each day to be alone with God**

- Don’t take calls or answer messages during this time (Try to leave your phone in another room.)
- Begin with 10 or 15 minutes. Choose one of the other practices of Jesus to do in this time.
- Expand this daily time with God as you grow more comfortable

² Psalm 46:10

³ Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*

⁴ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*.

- **Schedule a half-day retreat**
 - Go for a hike or walk
 - Schedule time at a retreat center
 - Schedule time at the prayer chapel at Greenwood Community Church

HELPFUL VERSES

"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed," Luke 5:16.

"Be still and know that I am God," Psalm 46:10.

"For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation," Psalm 62:1.

"Come away by yourselves to a quiet place," Mark 6:31.

INTERESTING QUOTES

"It's only in solitude that I discover that I am not alone," Anonymous.

"All in me is silence, and I am immersed in the silence of God," Catherine de Haecck Doherty.

"We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence," Malcolm Muggeridge.

"Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life," Henri Nouwen.

"Solitude is the one place where we can gain freedom from the forces of society that will otherwise relentlessly mold us," John Ortberg Jr.

"How do we have any kind of spiritual life at all if we can't pay attention longer than a goldfish? How do you pray, read the Scriptures, sit under a teaching at church, or rest well on the Sabbath when every chance you get, you reach for the dopamine dispenser that is your phone?" John Mark Comer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. What is your experience with solitude? Do you have any practices in this area already?
2. How do you feel about giving this practice a try? Where do you think you'll begin?
3. What do you think you might find challenging about this practice?
4. What appeals to you about this practice.
5. Someone in your group pray for you all as you head out to adopt this practice

After you have tried this practice:

1. Talk about your experiences with this practice.
2. What did you find helpful or good about this practice?
3. Was any part of this practice challenging?
4. How will you engage with this practice going forward?

SOLITUDE PODCAST

<https://pattern-podcast.blubrry.net/2019/08/22/solitude-pete-greig/>