



SOLITUDE: LISTENING TO GOD

“But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.”

Luke 5:16

Jesus said to them, “Come away with me. Let us go alone to a quiet place and rest for a while.”

Mark 6:31

The word translated in Luke 5:16 as “wilderness” and in Mark 6:31 as “quiet place” is the Greek word *erēmos* which means “solitary, lonely, desolate, uninhabited.”

After an intense time of ministry, Jesus often withdrew to a solitary place where we are told he spent time with God the Father. I cannot emphasize enough how profoundly important it is that if Jesus—who is God incarnate, divinity in the flesh—needed to get away to a solitary place, how much more do we—who are merely human—need to get away to a solitary place so that we can be with God?

Ruth Haley Barton defines solitude this way: “Solitude is a place. It is a place in time that is set apart for God and God alone, a time when we unplug and withdraw from the noise of interpersonal interactions, from the noise, busyness and constant stimulation associated with life in the company of others.”

Here is my definition: Solitude is intentional time alone devoted to abiding in God’s presence and listening for the still small voice.

Some of our deepest longings are drowned out, suffocated, and numbed by the distractions of our busy lives. Silence and solitude invite us to bring our inner being into the presence of God unhindered by distractions and noise so that we can be healed and made whole.

TIPS FOR SOLITUDE

Tips

- I would encourage you to not try to fill the entire time with reading a devotional, reading Scripture, or listening to music. Rather, spend some time simply being quiet in God's presence.
- Meditating on a verse or small portion of Scripture and journaling your thoughts could be valuable. The goal is to slow down and disengage from the constant need to be productive and/or distracted.

Here are some ways you might practice solitude:

Good

- In the shower.
- During mindless tasks (ironing, folding laundry, driving, waiting in the school pick up line, etc.)

Better

- Go for a walk or a run without music/distraction.

Best

- Dedicate a time and a place to meet with God in silence and solitude.

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In her Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes, “Times of solitude can be sweet times, but they can also be dark times when God seems to remain withdrawn and silent.

We seek the Lord but he doesn’t show up. These times of testing, or the ‘dark nights,’ like Jesus had in the wilderness, are well documented in the lives of saints. Don’t be afraid of the darkness or the solitude. Stay with God. The light will eventually dawn.”