



LONELY PLACES:  
SOLITUDE AND PRAYER

## SOLITUDE

*"In a noise-polluted world, it is even difficult to hear ourselves think let alone try to be still and know God. Yet it seems for our spiritual life to seek some silence, no matter how busy we may be. Silence is not to be shunned as empty space, but to be befriended as fertile ground for intimacy with God."*

**Susan Muto**

*"We are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order to not have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror."*

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

### **What is Silence & Solitude?**

Silence and solitude are spiritual practices which intentionally remove the distractions in your life for a brief, focused, time with God. These practices create a protected space in order to engage in the other disciplines. Silence and solitude can be a "container discipline" for the practice of other spiritual disciplines.

### **What does scripture say about Silence & Solitude?**

**Mark 1:35** *"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."*

**Lamentations 3:28** *"Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him."*

**1 Kings 19:12** *"After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper."*

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

## DIGGING DEEPER

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How do you avoid or resist silence?



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2. Do you like to fill silences with sound or learning – streaming music, podcasts, news, and so forth? What does this mean?  
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3. Where do you have silence with God in your life?
4. How and when do you resist or avoid being alone? What troubles you about being alone?
5. Where does your mind drift when you are alone?
6. When have you felt most comfortable being alone? Most uncomfortable?

### SPIRITUAL EXERCISES FOR SOLITUDE

1. Choose an activity where you can spend some designated time with God: a long drive, a hike, a walk, a bicycle ride, etc. Begin by praying over this time and dedicating it to God. During this time simply “be” with God; pray, worship, speak scripture. When the time is over journal about what it was like, what can you do differently, how can it be a common practice in your life?
2. Spend fifteen minutes along with God. You can do an activity if you wish: walk, run, drive, chores. 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. Set aside a half or whole day to vacation with God, get away with God. Go to a park, a chapel, a mountain to spend some lengthy time with God. See Eric for material if you choose to take this vacation with God.



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## LISTENING PRAYER

*The real 'work' of prayer is to become silent and listen to the voice that says good things about me... To gently push aside and silence the many voices that question my goodness and to trust that I will hear the voice of blessing – that demands real effort.*

Henri Nouwen

### SPIRITUAL EXERCISES FOR LISTENING PRAYER

#### READ

We often express our prayers out loud to the Father, yet hear the response silently in our minds as God's thoughts mingle with our thoughts. If we are honest, sometimes it can be intimidating to ask God to speak. What kinds of things can we expect the Father to say?

Like with prophecy described in **1 Corinthians 14:3-4**, the goal of the Father in listening prayer is always to strengthen, encourage, and comfort. If the Spirit does show us where something is off in our life, he calls us to repentance – not in shame, but to bring us to a place where we can experience more of his love and refreshing in our lives.

As you begin, remember that all of relationship with God starts and ends with God being good and loving. Imagine yourself as a child crawling up into the lap of your good Father, who loves you unconditionally. He wants nothing more than to be close to you and remind you of his love.

#### RESPOND

Start by asking Jesus to silence all other voices in the room, so that you can only hear the voice of the Father. This may take some time, but attempt to stay in this space. Also, ask Jesus to quiet any of the distracting thoughts in your mind.

1. Begin with forgiveness. Ask the Father to bring to mind anything you don't feel forgiven for. If there is anything, imagine taking it to the cross and leaving it there. Then ask the Father if there is anyone you need to forgive. If there is, imagine releasing this person and any offenses.



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2. Invite God to bring to mind what he wants to address. Perhaps explore some of these prompts:
  - Is there anything I believe about myself that is not true? What does the Father want to replace it with?
  - Ask the Father if there are any other things that he want to speak to you about.
  
3. When the Father brings something to mind, ask some follow up questions:
  - What do you want me to know about this?
  - Is there anything else? (Don't be afraid to wait longer and just enjoy the time of stillness in the presence of the Father.)
  
4. Here are a couple common frustrations when doing listening prayer:
  - What if you ask God to speak and there is nothing or you see just blackness in your mind's eye? If this is the case then ask the Father, "What do you want me to know about this?" Perhaps the blackness is an invitation into peace or rest. Press in and wait in his presence.
  - What if it's really hard to focus? Ask the Father, "What do you want me to know about this?" And remember that this is a Practice, it can take some time.
  - If you are not hearing anything, ask the Father if there is a Scripture that He wants to bring to mind.
  
5. Remember that, overall, this is a time to be deepening your relationship with the Father. Maybe this is just a time to relax with the God and receive his love.

### Resources:

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL, 2015, p.128-131.

<https://practicthewayarchives.org/pray/week-seven>