

Practising Spiritual Disciplines



SOLITUDE

Slowing • Silence • Listening

When we hear the word solitude we may have one of two responses: how I long for this, or, how can I possibly do that? Solitude is an invitation to enter the presence of God and feel him fully without the distractions of our day. It is a gift that allows us to withdraw, to quieten ourselves and experience the life-giving presence of God. Solitude is a place: it is a place in time that is set apart for God. It is unplugged, it is stepped back and it is uncluttered.

Solitude is not being isolated. It is not stomping off alone when things do not go our way. Solitude is intentionally stepping out of the busyness of our lives to listen to our bodies and our longings, and to encounter the restful and divine presence of God. Joyce Huggett states that it is “being still enough inwardly to hear God when God speaks.”

Why Practise Solitude?

- The demands of our day are relentless, and we often ignore our fatigue, overstimulation, longings and desires. When we step off the “busy train,” we first encounter ourselves—the good and bad. From this place of truth we are able to encounter the divine.
- Jesus modelled the discipline of solitude, especially in the midst of many hurdles—an incessant schedule, ever-present crowds and demands, and no place to lay his head. Yet despite these barriers, he frequently withdrew by himself to pray.
- In our age of technological wonders, we lose ourselves in the tyranny of the urgent, and run away from ourselves into busyness and noise. Solitude allows us to discover once again who we are and who God is. It enables us to give our full attention to God without the barrage of interruptions, technologies and schedules.

Practising Solitude: A Realistic Rhythm

- Jill Briscoe reminds us to “pray as you can, not as you can’t.” This is the same with solitude. Start small by identifying a personal space where you can enjoy being alone in God’s presence for just a few moments. As this becomes comfortable, add to the time.
- Remove distractions and barriers, and practise technological Sabbaths.
- Create a solitude date by setting aside a half-day to be alone, technology free, with God. It could be a walk through a forest or any space that helps you feel the presence of God.

Discovering Solitude in the Middle of the Muddle

Brother Lawrence encourages us to seek the little “lay-bys” that can be found if we look at our day creatively, especially when we are beset by busyness. As we create a space for solitude in our lives, we discover the inner prayer chapels of our souls (Lawrence). These we can enter as we wait in a grocery line, during a lull in a meeting or for a few moments at our desk. God is omnipresent. God is there with us when a little one throws up over the clean, folded laundry just as much as when we are sitting in our prayer chair. As we develop the discipline of solitude, we also develop the ability to recognize this divine presence through all of life’s muddles.

My Action Plan

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| → Set a solitude date —Carve out a half-day and enjoy a one-on-one date with God. | the phone, be physically alone, practise a breathing exercise, and listen to your body and to God. | into your inner self and enjoy the presence of God in the lay-bys of your day (waiting in a grocery line, sitting in your car). |
| → Start small —Set aside five minutes each day to withdraw. Turn off | → Identify your inner prayer closet —Learn to withdraw | |

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Cut out and keep in your Bible or journal. Allow these verses to mould your idea of solitude.

“The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him” (Habakkuk 2:20 *NIV*).

“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength” (Isaiah 30:15 *NIV*).

“Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10 *NIV*).

“Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest’ ” (Mark 6:31 *NIV*).

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6 *NIV*).

“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 *NIV*).

“Come near to God and he will come near to you” (James 4:8 *NIV*).

“Moses answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still’ ” (Exodus 14:13-14 *NIV*).

“The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” (Lamentations 3:25-26 *NIV*).