

Life Group Leader Guide #21

August 13, 2017

Silence & Solitude

Continuing our theme of 'simplicity', tonight we turn our attention to the disciplines of 'silence' and 'solitude.' The discipline of silence is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought. This time may be observed in order to read, write, pray, journal, think or simply just 'be.' Solitude is the spiritual exercise of voluntarily and temporarily withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes. This period may last only a few minutes or for days. As with silence, solitude may be sought in order to participate without interruption in other spiritual practices or to just be alone with God.

Whether you are a natural extrovert who loves being around people and as many people as you can... or maybe you're an introvert who hates social situations and craves the solitude of home... these practices can be extremely beneficial. For most of us, our lives are filled with 'noise.' From the 'noise' of a busy workplace, to the 'noise' of a busy family to the hustle and bustle of life in the 21st century, it seems that there is little time for quiet... much less quiet time with God. Through the centuries Christians have sought to draw nearer to God through disciplining the tongue and quieting the mind. It is no coincidence that a common refrain found throughout the Old Testament is the command from God, "Be still and know that I am God." While God can certainly be found and known in the chaos, there is something profound about the stillness that leads our hearts and minds towards greater communion with our Creator.

We see this in the example of Jesus who very often "withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Luke 4:42; 5:16; Mk 1:45) While Jesus also often interacted with great crowds of people, this time away, alone with His Father was very important to Him. We see it also in other "greats" from the Old Testament. It is no surprise to find them often spending large amounts of time in solitude if not complete silence. David wrote many of his psalms in the quiet solitude of the pastures. (Ps62:1-6) Samuel heard the voice of God in the still of the night. Moses spent forty years tending the sheep of his father, Jethro, which would have given him many moments of solitude, alone with his sheep!

The point is not just to withdraw from the people around us or situations we are uncomfortable with. Fellowship is also an important spiritual practice to the Christian. We

need each other and we need to be with each other! (Introverts listen up!) But it also benefits us all to pause, take time out and withdraw into solitude for quiet reflection or even to simply 'unplug' from the constant onslaught of 'noise' we grow accustomed to. (Extroverts are YOU listening?) Are you addicted to the 'noise'? Do you have to be with people or have some form of 'background noise' going on in order to survive? Then we wonder if you are allowing space in your life for you to hear the voice of God? Donald Whitney in his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* offers some suggestions for incorporating these practices into your life. These are paraphrased:

- Take time each day to "stop and smell the roses." Learn to pause to enjoy the simple pleasures of a beautiful sunrise, the smell of coffee in the morning, a beautiful flower or a precious moment with the family.
- Set a time each day (it doesn't have to be long) and develop a habit of quiet time. You might spend it praying, reading, thinking or just quietly reflecting.
- Try going for an extended period without speaking or disciplining yourself to say ONLY what is necessary to be said. (And yes, this goes for this preacher, too!)
- Every so often, get away. Go somewhere out of town and away from your daily responsibilities to spend a more extended period of time in quiet solitude, a "retreat" of sorts.
- Create a space in your home or find one nearby where you can go for some of these quiet moments.

Discuss:

1. Jesus sets an example for us to follow. Note how he spends his 'quiet time' in these passages: **Matt. 4:1; 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42**
2. In the following passages, how (and why) were each able to hear the voice of God? **1 Kings 19:11-13; Habakkuk 2:1; Gal.1:17**
3. Is it possible to express worship thru silence? How? **Zephaniah 1:7; Habakkuk 2:20; Isaiah 30:15**
4. In addition to our soul, what are some other reasons for quiet and solitude? **Mark 6:31**
5. How have you attempted to practice solitude and/or silence in your walk with the Lord? What are your insights?
6. Do you consider yourself an introvert or an extrovert and how does that affect your desire for or fear of solitude?
7. Loneliness is to be differentiated from solitude. Loneliness is often not chosen, while Solitude is an intentional practice. How can the church minister to those who are lonely and at the same time strike a healthy balance between fellowship & solitude?
8. What is the most challenging aspect of these disciplines for you right now?

Practice: Set aside ten minutes each day for quiet solitude. Go somewhere where no one will interrupt and sit in silence for this time. Read, pray, reflect, but do not sleep 😊 At the end of the week reflect on this time.