

Topic 22 Solitude & Silence *Learning to Quiet the Soul*

“This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.’”

Isaiah 30:15

In spending time alone, we really become like Jesus.

As we follow Jesus to *know* him and his teachings and as we *grow* to become more like him in character, we must also do the things Jesus did. We must engage in holy habits, or spiritual disciplines. These are integral to God’s mission of transformation – our own lives and the lives of others. Two of these holy habits are *solitude* and *silence*.



Looking at the Text

Repentance and Rest

Turning unto God in genuine conversion

Resting upon the grace of God for true salvation and deliverance through faith

- ❖ Business will not bring salvation

Submission and Faith

What the Bible Tells Us About Solitude

For Jesus, time in solitude was a top priority. Consider these passages, one from each of the four gospels:

“After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone” (Matthew 14:23).

“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).

“Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’” (Luke 9:18).

“Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself” (John 6:15).

1. What conclusions do you draw from those verses?

The Discipline in Action

Solitude

Solitude: to retreat – whether brief or long – from people and the distractions of life. It’s the deliberate choice to withdraw from social interaction and daily “to do” lists so that you can enter an environment in which you can focus your undivided attention on the Father in heaven. When the Bible emphasizes solitude, it doesn’t just mean “being alone.” It means “being alone *with God*.” This is important for at least three reasons:

✓ Solitude Is Preparatory

Time alone with God can strengthen us for upcoming ministry or life challenges. Jesus spent almost six weeks alone in the wilderness before commencing his public ministry (Matthew 4:2).

✓ Solitude Is Revealing

When we are socially engaged, mixing and mingling with people, or handling all of the tasks at work or home, it’s easy to become obsessed with what others think. In solitude all that is stripped away. It’s just us and the one who knows us through and through, the one who loves us fully and completely. Solitude clarifies exactly what we’ve been looking to for our identities. Like Jesus in the wilderness, solitude forces us to deal with the temptation to find significance in unhealthy ways, and it helps us see that God loves us unconditionally

✓ Solitude Is Restorative

When we’re tired or confused, when we have forgotten who and whose we really are, solitude can help us regain our bearings. By withdrawing, we can tune out all the other voices and hear the one voice that matters most.

In 1 Kings 19:1–4, 9–13 (nlt) we read a great example of the restorative power of solitude in the life of the prophet Elijah. After a stressful time of ministry in which he had faced down hundreds of false prophets, these events happened:

When [King] Ahab got home, he told Jezebel [his wife, the queen] everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: “May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them.”

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. But the Lord said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Elijah replied, “I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets.

I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.” “Go out and stand before me on the mountain,” the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And a voice said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

2. The sound Elijah heard in verse 12, “a gentle whisper,” is also translated as “a low whisper” (esv), and “a gentle blowing” (nasb).

3. What exactly do you think he heard in this solitary place?

4. When you’ve spent time alone in the presence of God, how have you sensed him speaking to you?

5. If you’ve never sensed God speaking to you what are other ways God gets your attention in “a gentle whisper”?

Silence

Silence is the absence of noise and commotion. To “practice the discipline of silence” is to make the deliberate choice to enter into the quiet. Once there, instead of filling time and space with words, or others we listen attentively. We do so because as Solomon wisely noted, there is a “time to be quiet and a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:7, nlt).



Consider these passages from the psalms and the prophets that emphasize the important role being quiet plays in the spiritual life.

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!” (Psalm 46:10, esv)

“But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content.” (Psalm 131:2)

“But the lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” (Habakkuk 2:20, esv)

“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. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust—there may yet be hope” (Lamentations 3:25–29).

6. How can noise, talking, and busyness actually be addictive?

7. Do you think there might be occasions when it's appropriate to withdraw even from written words? Can a person?

8. What does sitting in silence make you feel?

Life Application

Think of a few ways you can find solitude.

