



Overview-Solitude

The practice of Solitude is finding a space of being alone, and yet not being lonely. We read throughout the bible that God meets people when they intentionally create open space and purposefully abstain from interaction with other human beings so that, freed from competing loyalties they are found by God. This same tradition has been handed down from generation to generation, so that now, in a time when we are more connected and more fatigued from those connections, we have a clear path to come apart and be alone.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus says “Come away to a quiet place all by yourselves and rest awhile.” (Mark 6:31) This invitation, extended two thousand years ago, continues to resonate in the lives of believers today as we recognize that following Jesus cannot be done at a sprint. Finding rhythms of stillness set apart from the cares of this world helps us to diligently, steadily, follow the one our hearts, minds, and spirits yearn for.

This January we invite you to rest in Solitude, to seek time set apart with the one who created you, to seek in him true connection that fills you up for the continuing journey you (and those in your care) find yourselves on. In a time when we have been isolated, we invite you to choose solitude instead of having it thrust upon you.

We have curated several sources: articles, activities, podcast episodes, books, etc. to help you as you lead your youth. We believe that Solitude is a foundational spiritual practice, and it is our prayer that, this month, you and your youth are able to set aside time where you can encounter Christ, and that these moments of solitude help to enhance your daily life.

If you have any questions, or would like to recommend a resource to add to this release, please contact CBOQ Youth by emailing Meghan at mmatthews@baptist.ca

Blessings to you this month,

The CBOQ Youth team



Scripture about Solitude

Exodus 33:7,11

“Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. . . The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”

Lamentations 3:28

“Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him.”

Psalms 62:5

“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone.”

Matthew 6:6

“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

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.”

Luke 5:16

“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

Luke 6:12-13

“Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them.”

John 6:15

“Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.”

LESSON SAMPLE (1 Hour Version)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students Will:

- Create a “Cloudy Jar” as a physical reminder of the practice of Solitude
- Spend some time in Solitude
- Debrief their experience and plan to practice on their own

MATERIALS NEEDED:

In-Person:

Necessary Materials:

- Jars/containers (either glass or clear plastic) with lids: enough for each participant
- Sediment for container. Can be actual dirt, or an alternative* like glitter, or fake snow
- *if using an alternative, you could also get glycerin (can be found at craft stores, or in baking sections). Glycerin helps to slow the fall of glitter in the jar.
- Water (to fill containers)
- Bibles or print outs of scripture (see end of lesson): enough for each participant
- Pens
- Journals, or paper for people to write on

Additional Materials:

- Hot glue (for containers that don’t have a good seal)
- Quiet music to help set the atmosphere
- A way to keep track of time

Synchronous Online:

Necessary Materials:

- Same as in-person

Asynchronous Online:

Necessary Materials:

- Same as in-person

SETUP:

In-Person:

- Gather supplies and have them ready for each participant
- Consider assigning a “solitude space” for each participant to go to during their solitude time

Synchronous Online:

- Send *materials required* list to all participants (ahead of time so they can gather/purchase items)

OR

- Put together packages for participants and deliver to their homes

Asynchronous Online:

- See Synchronous options

PREAMBLE (5 minutes)

It is counter-cultural to be silent and alone. People (including me) are so tied to our phones that we stay instantly connected, to technology and to each other. But getting away and practicing solitude can be a powerful experience.

A cloudy jar full of river water is a great analogy: if you let the jar sit for an hour, the sediment will settle to the bottom and the water will become clear. So, it is with our mind, body, and soul. If we allow ourselves to be quiet, even for a short time, we will be able to see things more clearly, hear better, and make better decisions about our lives.

Today we are going to make some cloudy jars and then we are going to take some time to be on our own.

MINDS ON (5-10 minutes)

Say: Before we get to our activity, let's take our collective pulse on the practice of Solitude.

Invite: Students to offer their thoughts on what solitude is all about, where they might envision themselves being if they wanted to be truly “alone,” and whether or not they think that Solitude is a way they can see themselves meeting with God.

- If you have a particularly active group you could ask questions and have them move to one side of the room or the other by asking “either, or” questions.
 - If solitude makes you feel anxious (go to the left), if it makes you feel peaceful (go to the right)
 - If you want to be in solitude indoors (go to the left), if you want to be outdoors (go to the right)
 - If you think God will meet you in solitude (go to the left), if you meet God in group settings (go to the right)
 - Etc.

Say: Before we move on, I want to bring a piece of scripture to your attention. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus says “Come away to a quiet place all by yourselves and rest awhile.” (Mark 6:31).

Synchronous Adaptation: If your students want to talk- that's great! If you want to do a more interactive “Minds On” use the “either, or” questions above, but have them raise 1 or 2 fingers (instead of moving).

Asynchronous Adaptation: offer your participants the questions above to reflect on prior to starting the activity.



ACTIVITY (20-30 minutes)

Say: To ease us into the practice of solitude, we are going to prepare for solitude by working near each other before going off on our own. I encourage you to prepare your jars in silence before going to your “Solitude Space.”

When in your space you can sit, or stand, read scripture, or pray, or just try to feel the presence of God around you.

When (*amount of time that makes sense for your group*) has passed, I’ll let you know, and we will all come back together to discuss our time in Solitude.

Instructions for Cloudy Jars:

- Add sediment/glitter to your container
- Add water to the container
- If using glitter, add glycerin to the mixture
- Seal the container
- Shake the container (if you want to add more sediment/glitter, now is the time)
- *if the seal isn’t great you can use hot glue to make it tighter

Synchronous Adaptation: ask participants to make their Jars online (with cameras on, if possible). When they have finished making their jars, they can turn their cameras off. Let participants know that you will turn your camera back on when it is time to come together again.

Asynchronous Adaptation: give participants instructions, and scripture. Invite them to try this activity at their own pace.

DEBRIEF (10-15 minutes)

Ask your students questions to debrief the experience, for example:

- How did it feel to spend time on your own?
- Did having scripture help you to hear from God?
- Did your Cloudy Jar help you to focus on being in the moment?
- Is this a practice that you could see yourself doing again? Why/why not?
- Did anyone hear/sense something from God that they would like to share?
- Was there anything unexpected about this experience?
- Etc.

HOMEWORK/WEEKLY CHALLENGE (5 minutes)

Take some time away this week, by yourself and turn off your phone. Drive, walk, or bike to somewhere beautiful, sit by a tree or look at a lake. Sit in a special spot in your home, that allows you to be away from those you live with. Let your spirit settle and listen for God. You may not hear a voice, but God can speak in many ways.

Use your Cloudy Jar, as a physical reminder of this practice. Shake it up and focus on it for as long as it takes for the sediment to settle.



SOLITUDE SCRIPTURE

Lamentations 3:28

“Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him.”

Psalm 62:5

“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone.”

Mark 6:31:

“Come away to a quiet place all by yourselves and rest awhile.”

1 Kings 19: 3-13:

³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

⁷ The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁰ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

¹¹ The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

LESSON SAMPLE (15 Minute Version)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students Will:

- Create a “Cloudy Jar” as a physical reminder of the practice of Solitude
- Be given a challenge to practice Solitude outside of group time

MATERIALS NEEDED:

In-Person:

Necessary Materials:

- Jars/containers (either glass or clear plastic) with lids: enough for each participant
- Sediment for container. Can be actual dirt, or an alternative* like glitter, or fake snow
- *if using an alternative, you could also get glycerin (can be found at craft stores, or in baking sections). Glycerin helps to slow the fall of glitter in the jar.
- Water (to fill containers)
- Bibles or print outs of scripture (see end of lesson): enough for each participant
- Pens
- Journals, or paper for people to write on

Additional Materials:

- Hot glue (for containers that don't have a good seal)
- Quiet music to help set the atmosphere
- A way to keep track of time

Synchronous Online:

Necessary Materials:

- Same as in-person

Asynchronous Online:

Necessary Materials:

- Same as in-person

SETUP:

In-Person:

- Gather supplies and have them ready for each participant

Synchronous Online:

- Send *materials required* list to all participants (ahead of time so they can gather/purchase items)

OR

- Put together packages for participants and deliver to their homes

Asynchronous Online:

- See Synchronous options

Instructions for Cloudy Jars:

- Add sediment/glitter to your container
- Add water to the container
- If using glitter, add glycerin to the mixture
- Seal the container
- Shake the container (if you want to add more sediment/glitter, now is the time)
- *if the seal isn't great you can use hot glue to make it tighter

Synchronous Adaptation: ask participants to make their Jars online (with cameras on, if possible). When they have finished making their jars, they can turn their cameras off. Let participants know that you will turn your camera back on when it is time to come together again.

Asynchronous Adaptation: give participants instructions, and scripture. Invite them to try this activity at their own pace.

HOMEWORK/WEEKLY CHALLENGE (5 minutes)

Take some time away this week, by yourself and turn off your phone. Drive, walk, or bike to somewhere beautiful, sit by a tree or look at a lake. Sit in a special spot in your home, that allows you to be away from those you live with. Let your spirit settle and listen for God. You may not hear a voice, but God can speak in many ways.

Use your Cloudy Jar, as a physical reminder of this practice. Shake it up and focus on it for as long as it takes for the sediment to settle.

Alternative Idea:

Give participants the Asynchronous instructions (from the 1-hour lesson) and have them come to group time ready to debrief their experiences from outside of group time.

RESOURCES

BOOK LIST FOR SOLITUDE

Barton, Ruth Hailey. *Invitation to Solitude and Silence.*

Nouwen, Henri. *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life.*

General Books on Spiritual Practices:

Ahlberg-Calhoun, Adele. *The Spiritual Practices Handbook.*

Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline.*

Shiflett, Diana. *Spiritual Practices in Community.*

Smith, Traci. *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home.*

Thompson, Marjorie. *Soul Feast.*

Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines.*

THE PRACTICE OF SOLITUDE

For those who have not spent time in solitude before, the following guidelines might be helpful:

1. Arrive

Give yourself time to arrive. It can sometimes take time to 'land.' Your mind may be busy with thoughts and worries from where you've come. It can also take a while to adjust to unfamiliar surroundings especially if you have not been on a solitary retreat before. You may find that you are tired to the point of exhaustion and just need to sleep. Take time to do what you need to do. There is no rush. You are here and this is holy ground. Whatever you need to do is enough.

2. Take in your surroundings

Look around and take in your surroundings. Drink in the beauty and peace of nature. Allow yourself to notice small things – the green of a leaf, the graceful bend of a tree, the shape of clouds. Let the song of the birds fall upon your ear. This is your space – make yourself at home in it.

Look around your hermitage also and take time to settle in. Arrange things as you want them and make yourself comfortable. For the next few days, this is your kingdom – the cave into which you make your retreat from the world, the nest from which you take flight again back, refreshed, to what you have left.

3. Become attuned to silence

Silence is not the absence of sound. It is rather a quality of listening. It can be disconcerting to find that the silence expected in a hermitage is actually filled with sounds – the singing of birds, the barking of a dog, the sighing of the wind through the trees. There can be other sounds too – the banging of a door, a voice heard in the distance, the hum of a fridge, the annoying tick of a clock.

As you settle into the silence, you become aware of sounds like these. Sometimes it can feel as if they are disturbing the silence. Take time to become aware of these sounds and welcome them. Integrate them into your silence. Notice how they arise and fall away. Allow them to come and go. You are the still pond in which sounds pass through like ripples. They do not take away from the silence; they are part of it.

4. Listen

Take time to listen. This is why you have come. If you listen, you will hear what you have been called into the silence to hear. You will hear what you need to hear – now, at this time, in this place. The voice which speaks the truth you need to hear is already there within you. It may be soft and gentle, barely a whisper; it may be loud and urgent, not to be ignored. Take time to listen to this voice. It is the voice of your deepest self and it will speak to your hopes and dreams and sorrows. It will bring healing and peace, joy and inspiration. It will guide you towards the Ultimate Mystery. It will show you the path you must walk. Listen to this voice. Listen with the ear of your heart. Listen.

5. Be present

As you listen, you will become more present. You will begin to inhabit more fully each moment as it passes. A quality of mindfulness will develop where you begin to pay more attention to what is happening here now. This is a gradual process that takes place over time so do not be dismayed if you cannot sense it happening straight away. Little by little, you will become more deeply present – to your surroundings, to the people you meet, to yourself and ultimately to the One who is always



present, to Eternal Presence itself. Let yourself become anchored in this presence so that, as things arise and pass away, you will not be disturbed but will continue to simply be present to what happens as it happens. Soon you will realize that this simple being present is always enough.

6. Focus

It can sometimes be helpful to have a focus for the practice of listening and being present. We choose a focus and place our attention upon it. When the mind wanders (as it inevitably does – sometimes every few seconds), we notice that it has wandered and bring it gently back to the focal point. We do this again and again, as often as is necessary. This helps to steady and quieten the mind.

Any number of things could be chosen as a focus: a candle or an icon; the breath as it enters and leaves our body; the body itself and its sensations; the silent repetition of a sacred word or mantra. It is not important what is chosen; what is important is to keep bringing the mind back to this focus when it wanders.

Do not scold yourself if your mind wanders. It is only to be expected (for advanced practitioners as well as beginners). Distraction is part of spiritual life. All that is required is that, when you notice the mind has wandered, you bring it gently back. This constant noticing and bringing back is what meditation consist of.

7. Move mindfully

Movement is an integral part of any period of solitude. It is impossible (and unhealthy) to spend the entire time sitting still. Exercise and fresh air are very beneficial, and, in such beautiful surroundings, it is good to get out for a walk if possible.

Movement can be integrated easily into one's practice. Simply pay attention to the sensation of movement itself, to the feelings in your body as you walk, to the sights and sounds and smells all around you. This can help to deepen the quality of your listening. It can also engender a joyful awareness of being alive and part of the interconnectedness of all things.

Carrying out any chores in your hermitage (cooking, washing dishes, etc.) can also be integrated into your practice. Simply attend to what you are doing as you are doing it. Thich Nhat Hanh has a saying, "You can wash the dishes in order to have clean dishes or you can wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes." Washing dishes is not simply a chore to be got out of the way: it is another opportunity for the practice of mindfulness, listening, being present.

8. Read reflectively

While you are in solitude, it is best not to overload the mind with information or news. This allows the mind to empty itself of much of the unnecessary information with which it has become cluttered and to process what really needs to be dealt with. It is this 'de-cluttering' which allows the mind to quieten and eventually come to rest.

For this reason, it is best to keep reading to a minimum and to avoid radio, TV and the internet altogether. As far as possible, avoid use of your mobile phone. On the other hand, mindful meditative reading of scripture or poetry can be conducive to the process of listening. A little spiritual reading can also be helpful, but it is good to remember that less is more. A little reading followed by reflection is better than trying to cram in a lot.



9. Become aware

As you spend time in solitude, you will start to notice much about yourself and your experience that had escaped your notice before. Thoughts, feelings, ideas, bodily sensations will all start coming to the surface and clamoring for your attention. This can feel overwhelming or confusing at first.

Try not to identify with what comes up in your experience – whether positive or negative. As far as possible, let your thoughts and feelings come and go – without trying to hold onto them and without trying to push them away. Simply become aware of them. Acknowledge the effect they are having on you. Try not to judge them.

It is good to bring an attitude of curiosity and exploration to this inner activity. You may like to gently enquire of your experience: what is this thing and how did it get here? Notice how thoughts and feelings arise and pass away. Where possible, let them go. If this is not possible, simply notice that you have become attached and let them be. Do not try to fight them. Be open to what they may have to teach you and know that they will change of their own accord when the time is right.

10. Be gentle with yourself

It is extremely important to be gentle with yourself as you engage in the practice of solitude. Sometimes the thoughts and feelings which come to the surface are disturbing. One can feel overwhelmed by negative feelings or ‘stuck’ in old patterns of thought or behaviour. It is easy to become frustrated or depressed at an apparent lack of progress.

Whatever your experience, hold it gently and be kind to yourself. Try not to judge yourself. Remember, we are all imperfect and much of spiritual growth is concerned with becoming aware of our flaws and accepting them. We are all in need of mercy in some way and it is this very need that opens us up to the grace of the Transcendent. As St. Paul says, it is “when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor 12:10)

Do not be afraid to accept your weaknesses. We all have them, and we are all struggling with the human condition one way or another. The more we are kind and compassionate with ourselves, the more we will be kind and compassionate to others.

11. Balance your effort

A common mistake made by those new to the practice of solitude is to try too hard. It is necessary to strike a healthy balance between having a little structure and discipline to your days and pushing yourself too hard. Too much effort produces a striving energy which gets in the way of the open and relaxed state of mind which makes it possible to listen and to be present. Go easy on yourself. If you need to sleep, sleep. If you need to relax, relax. Listen to your body and what it needs. Trust that each moment contains all it needs for your spiritual growth. And don’t be afraid to laugh at yourself now and then.

Keep in mind also that being in solitude is not easy. If this is your first experience, you may find that a little is enough. You may even find that you need to leave before you had planned to. Do not be hard on yourself if this happens. Your inner being knows what is right for you and knows if it is good for you to be in solitude or not. Listen to your inner being. If you need to leave, leave. Know that this too is okay. Remember there are many different ways to pray and right now solitude may simply not be the way for you.

12. Look for support

If you begin to experience negative feelings, you may wish to look for spiritual support, particularly if this is your first experience of solitude. Spiritual support generally consists of talking over what is going on with someone experienced in the area of spiritual accompaniment. However overwhelming or difficult one's experience may be, it almost always helps to talk to someone who listens without judging and accepts you as you are.

Spiritual companions will not be able to provide easy or instant answers; but they may ask questions or provide guidance that helps one to articulate one's experience and to become clearer about the issues involved. Above all, simply talking to another person breaks down any feelings of isolation that may be developing and gives one a sense of companionship on the journey.

13. Go for refuge

Going for refuge to the truth of one's faith is probably the most important support of all. When things get difficult and particularly if you begin to doubt yourself, you will need to return to the core of your faith, to that which prompted you to start out on this path in the first place.

This faith will differ from person to person. Christians might remember that we are loved by God. Buddhists might recall our ability to grow and develop and ultimately reach Enlightenment. In each case, going for refuge means trusting in one's goodness as a human being, believing that one can change for the better and standing firm in the truth that it is meaningful and worthwhile to engage in this process.

It is our faith and the truth it embodies which helps us to stay with the process of being in solitude and to cope with whatever difficulties arise. By returning to the core of what gives us refuge, we remember that "all shall be well, all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well." (Julian of Norwich)

14. Return with care

When the period of solitude is over, it will be necessary to return to the world. This is not always easy. Sometimes the noise and 'busyness' of life can be jarring after the experience of silence. Sometimes, one's expectations can be too high and can lead to disappointment.

Again, be gentle with yourself. Acknowledge the impact of what is happening to you and try to be present to it. It may help to set aside some time each day to practice the quiet listening you experienced in your time of solitude. Remember that change is difficult and takes time and patience. Do not try to force anything and do not give yourself a hard time if you are not able to do what you hoped. Do what you can and be kind to yourself. As far as possible, bring that kindness into the dealings you have with people around you. The journey of St. Kevin was from solitude to community. Any authentic experience of solitude will bear fruit in greater kindness and compassion in our lives.

Finally, remember the solitude is always here – waiting for you. Sometimes we need to return to solitude to refresh ourselves so we can turn again to the tasks we face in the world, renewed by the gifts and peace we have found.

Adapted from: <https://glendaloughhermitage.ie/about/the-practice-of-solitude/>

TIPS FOR PRACTICING SOLITUDE

Three things to consider when practicing solitude:

1. Solitude doesn't require silence

Silence and solitude are complementary disciplines that aid our communion with God. But while silence almost always requires solitude, solitude does not necessarily require silence. We can use our time of solitude for prayer, verbal meditation on Scripture, singing psalms or hymns of praise or any other form of “noisy” activity. Solitude doesn't require either silence or a hushed solemnity.

2. Solitude requires planning

Our lives tend to be filled with people and events, making it unlikely we'll accidentally stumble into solitude. Being alone with God requires planning. Choose a place where you can be intimate with God and free from distractions. This “special place” doesn't need to be special — it just needs to be a place where you can remove yourself from the world for as much time as needed.

3. Solitude requires time

On most days the best we can do is to get away alone for a few minutes, or even an hour. We should cherish these times and guard them carefully. Yet while these solitary moments are necessary, they're hardly sufficient to meet our need for closeness with our Creator. Commit to finding creative ways to be alone with God for extended periods of solitude, ranging from a few hours to a few days.

Three reasons solitude is necessary for spiritual formation:

1. Solitude amplifies other disciplines

We can carry out almost every other discipline in the company of others. We can pray, meditate and worship almost anytime and in any place. But practicing those disciplines in the context of solitude helps us achieve a greater focus and augments our efforts.

2. Solitude is not about being alone

Normally when we use the term solitude, we're referring to the state of being alone. But solitude also has the meaning of “absence of human activity.” This is what we mean when we refer to the discipline; the purpose is not to be alone but to experience the absence of human activity so that we can more fully experience the presence of God.

3. Solitude exposes our idols

We might tell ourselves we prefer God's company to that of any other person or thing in the world. Solitude puts that claim to the test. By being alone with God we get a clearer view of the idols of our heart, and we are presented with an opportunity to repent.

Adapted from: <https://www.thenivbible.com/blog/how-to-practice-solitude/>



SOLITUDE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How and when do you resist or avoid being alone?
2. What tends to pop into your mind when you are alone?
3. What do you resort to doing when alone?
4. What troubles you or makes you antsy about being alone?
5. When have you felt most comfortable being alone? Most uncomfortable?
6. What sense of God do you have when you are alone?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. In a place where you can't be interrupted, intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Recognize that the Lord is as near as your own breathing. Inhale God's breath of life; exhale all that weighs on you. Simply be alone with God.
 - When it is time to return to others, leave the presence of God gently. Carry the sense of being alone with God with you into the next thing.
2. Spend fifteen minutes or more alone with God. You can do an activity if you wish: walk, run, drive, iron. 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. Make the time you spend in the shower each morning your alone time with God. Present yourself to your Creator — all of your body, all of the dirt that has accumulated in your soul, all that God has made you to be. Let the water from the shower remind you of the water of life that nourishes and changes you. Let the warmth touch you with love. If you like a cold shower, let the bracing impact call you to live your life to the full. Offer yourself to God for the day. Thank him for the alone time he spends with you.
4. Set aside half a day for time alone with God. Go to a retreat center, quiet chapel or park. Don't stay in your home. Take only your Bible.

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GROWING TOGETHER: PRACTICAL STEPS

In this section devoted to practice, let me suggest some of the varied venues for solitude that are within the reach of everyone.

Take a pre-dawn walk. Listen to the awakening sounds of your world, whether city or country. Give the coming day to God. Listen for his guidance over the labor of the day. It is an ancient discipline to welcome the new day in faith and worship. “O Lord, in the morning thou dost hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for thee, and watch” (Ps. 5:3). “And in the morning, a great while before day, he [Jesus] rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed” (Mark 2:35).

For one month leave your car radio off and turn your morning commute into a mini retreat. Pray for the person in the car ahead of you. Consider the lilies of the field and how they differ from the frantic scramble of human activity around you. Try driving in the slow lane for a change. Bless those who cut in front of you; bless and do not curse them. Listen for divine impressions on upcoming meetings, relationships in the office, creative solutions to troubling business situations, and more.

In the middle of the morning or afternoon, take a five-minute worship break. Enjoy a fresh-cut flower on your desk or a tranquil picture or saying on the wall. Stroll around the office building (or home or field or school), prayerfully placing every person who works there into the strong, protective arms of God. Tap your toe or finger to the tune of a simple worship song. Enjoy a fresh cup of coffee and with every sip ask for the inflow of God’s warmth.

Lim-it your speech to an absolute minimum for one day. See what you learn about your-self; for example, how frantically you depend upon words to manipulate situations. Watch for how words bless and encourage, and how they wound and destroy. For the future consider ways that your words can be few and full.

Make your next plane flight or bus trip a personal retreat. Watch people. Listen. Pray. Read through a good book in one sitting.

Have an experience of “watching”. Arise at 2:00 a.m., light a single candle as a reminder of the presence of Christ, and for one hour listen to the sounds of the night. Don’t try to read or write. This is a time for silence, for stillness. Don’t even try to pray in the normal sense of talking or articulating thoughts. Be quiet. Enter the Shalom of God. After the hour, return to bed and to sleep, remembering the words of Brother Lawrence; “those who have the gale of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep.”

Leave phone, TV, and radio off while cleaning the house or basement or garage or working on a hobby. View this time of quiet as a special gift from God during which you can listen for his whisperings.

Taken from “Fac-ing the Fear of Solitude: Soli-tude helps us release the need to man-age or con-trol peo-ple and circumstances” by Richard Foster. Full article can be found: <https://renovare.org/articles/the-fear-of-solitude>



IDEAS TO PRACTICE THE DISCIPLINE OF SOLITUDE

We practice this Discipline of Solitude simply by becoming silent during our times with God. So, when we are doing our devotions, we spend a few minutes in Scripture reading, then in prayer, read a devotion and then we set some time aside to quite ourselves and just being there, communing with God without saying a word. This can be for a few minutes to a few days. This is awkward for some people, as some people do not like silence while others do not like to relinquish what they perceive to be control. But this Discipline of Solitude is an excellent tool to build our relationship with Christ! It takes time to practice and get used to it, but once we do, it is phenomenal way to build intimacy with Christ and maturity in our Christian life! This is called building our "inner life" as we allow God to be God in our life, being poured out to Him, as we open ourselves to Him, so He penetrates us through and through (Gal. 2:20-21). So, as you spend more time in your devotions set aside time for silence and then contemplate (recall and reflect) what He has revealed to you during your devotion and then "be still." You may even desire to make a half or whole day of it as a personal retreat. Go some were you are not bothered or distracted do your devotions and mark a few hours for quite reflection and listening.

Further Questions

1. How would you define the Discipline of Solitude? What gets in the way of you getting away for some Solitude?
2. What part does Solitude play in your relationships with church members, friends, coworkers, and family?
3. What is the cost to your life, personally and to the people around you, when you refuse to spend some time alone with God and listen to Him?
4. What happens when your church leadership refuses to practice listening to God or teach and encourage its people to grow deeper in Christ?
5. What happens to your relationship with God, with others, and with the opportunities God gives you when you allow stresses and storms of life to overwhelm you? How can the Discipline of Solitude help you?
6. When have you exercised Solitude the most? What is the difference between Solitude and over busyness?
7. In what situation did you fail to engage in Solitude when you should have? What does it mean to your dally life, with all its stresses, that you realize He is listening to you?
8. Look at Habakkuk 2:20. How can your silence be glorifying to our Lord? Why are some people uncomfortable with silence?
9. How would Solitude help you to distinguish when you are overworked or to busy? What would real, authentic Solitude look like in your life?
10. What issue is in your life that would improve with more Solitude and time alone with God?

11. How can you speak and model to others so they might be inclined to accept the authority of Jesus Christ? How does Solitude play out here?

12. Think through the steps that you need to take to put Solitude into action in a specific instance. For example, how can you use this Discipline of Solitude to improve your faith, Fruit, character, relationships, confidence, leadership ability, parenting, and/or relationship with Christ and others? What do you need to do to make this more of a reality in your life and in your church? What would your church look like if you and the leadership were to spend more alone time with God? What will you do now? Practice this discipline, read Psalm 130 (or any Psalm such as the first five) in a slow prayerful and way and then just listen to God. Try this every day for a week start with 3 minutes and try to work up to 15 minutes.

Taken from: "The Discipline of Solitude" by Dr. Richard J. Krejcir. Full article available at:
<http://www.discipleshiptools.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=37474&columnid=>

QUOTES ON SOLITUDE

Teachings on the difference between solitude and loneliness, what you can learn from moments of solitude, and how to practice it.

"Time spent alone returns to you a hundredfold because it is the proving ground of the spirit. . .

"Loneliness is small; solitude is large. Loneliness closes in around you; solitude expands toward the infinite. Loneliness has its roots in words, in an internal conversation that nobody answers; solitude has its roots in the great silence of eternity."

"In solitude silence becomes a symphony. Time changes from a series of moments strung together into a seamless motion riding on the rhythms of the stars. Loneliness is banished, solitude is in full flower, and we are one with the pulse of life and the flow of time."

"As always, look at the world around you. The mountain is not restless in its aloneness. The hawk tracing circles in the sky is not longing for union with the sun. They exist in the perfect peace of an eternal present, and that is the peace that one finds only in solitude. Find this peace in yourself, and you will never know another moment of loneliness in your life."

— Kent Nerburn's [*Simple Truths*](#)

"A certain brother went to Abbot Moses in Scete, and asked him for a good word. And then the elder said to him: 'Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.' " Here is something essential, inescapable for any of us. Unless we learn to live with ourselves, how can we live with others? Unless we know ourselves, accept ourselves with honesty and forgiveness, how can we possibly know or accept other people?"

— Esther de Waal's [*The Celtic Way of Prayer*](#)

"A first step in practicing solitude is learning to take advantage of 'mini retreats' or 'little solitudes' that comprise our days. Ideally, these moments of solitude will also be silent, such as when you first wake up or while you sip your coffee before work. More likely, they'll include the noise of everyday life as you make your way through traffic or ride in an elevator or wait on hold for someone on the other end of the phone. The point is to make the most out of these moments by quieting the noise within yourself and being present to the here and now rather than becoming impatient or getting lost in to-do lists and worries."

"Additional steps in practicing solitude include setting aside a small block of time each day to rest and recharge, limiting how much you speak (try to go an entire day without speaking!), and designating a quiet place (inside or outside your home) and a time when you can retreat there for a regular period of solitude and silence. One of the hardest things about the practice of solitude is to do nothing except be still and listen. Practice is the key."

"To take your practice of solitude further, try to get away for a few half- or full-day periods each year. Or, if possible, go on a retreat for two days or more. Take little more with you than a change of clothes, a Bible, and a journal. Use this time to reevaluate where you are in life: Where do you want to be in three years? In five years? In seven years?"

— Jeremy Langford's *Healthy Spiritual Life*

Adapted from *Passages on Solitude*. Original article can be found at:

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/quotes/features/view/20405/passages-on-solitude>

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF SOLITUDE

What is solitude?

- It's a time when we withdraw from the company of others in order to be with God and give him our undivided attention.
- It creates a space for listening to the deep “nudging & knowing” that goes beyond words.
- It's the place where your personal desires and what's most real about yourself and God mingle together.

Why is the practice of solitude important?

- “One of the fundamental purposes of solitude is to give us a concrete way of entering into such stillness, so that God can come in and do what only God can do.” – Ruth Haley Barton
- We were created for core connection and union with God. It's the space needed for God to work so that we become more fully ourselves and secure in Christ's love for us.
- There is nothing in our culture that reinforces rest, stillness and listening to God. We need to make intentional space for this sort of thing.
- Jesus modeled this in his life and ministry (Mark 1, 6; Matthew 4, 14, 17, 26; Luke 6)

How is this different from prayer?

- There is no specific “to-do” agenda, or list of things to pray about- no specific activity needed.
- It's a space for listening with no pressure to put all of your feelings and thoughts into words/conversation.
- Because it's done alone, there is no opportunity for judgment from others.

How do I get started?

- Unplug and withdraw from the noise, busyness and stimulation that come from technology, people, and responsibility.
- Make sure you are comfortable. Find a good chair!
- Don't force or rush any thoughts, nor push any thoughts away. Just let whatever comes to the surface come, and then let it go and move on.
- Baby steps...maybe start by getting used to 5 or 10 minutes at a time, a few days a week. Finally – move towards longer spans of times – hours, or even a 24-48 hour silent retreat.

Things to keep in mind:

- It can be difficult to just be with yourself – your desires, longings, and insecurities.
- Be gentle with yourself. Like anything new, it takes time to get used to and become used too.
- Feel the difference between trying to fix “it” and just being with “it”. Rest and be still in knowing that God is right there “moving” in you. Things are being chipped away.
- Capture your thoughts and feelings periodically. What is being transacted between you and God in your times of solitude?

Adapted from *Life's Great Dare* (handout). Full version can be found here:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55e9e549e4b073fd0b4ab15e/t/5722113ec6fc0829df2c0873/1461850430317/Th+e+Spiritual+Practice+of+Solitude.pdf>

OTHER RESOURCES FOR SOLITUDE

ARTICLES

[Solitude as a Spiritual Discipline](#)

[Understanding Solitude](#)

[Facing the Fear of Solitude](#)

[The Spiritual Discipline of Solitude and Covid-19](#)

[The Discipline of Solitude](#)

[Soul Shepherding: Solitude and Silence](#)

VIDEOS

[The Discipline of Silence and Solitude](#)

IDEAS

[Six weeks of Practices for Solitude and Silence¹](#)

¹ This is an 18 page document that provides practical application for practicing solitude. Each week focuses on a different element of the practice: the basics, emotional health, casting care (anxiety), listening prayer, *lectio divina*, and a retreat. Well worth a look for a deep dive on Solitude.