



Silence
and
Solitude

Silence & Solitude

(Excerpt from Devotional Classics, Richard Foster & James Bryan Smith)

Reflection Questions

1. Describe your previous experience, if any, with silence and solitude.

2. Read Psalm 39.

This is a good example of how our life before God can become “a kind of descent into our own nothingness, a recognition of helplessness, frustration, infidelity, confusion, ignorance.” (Thomas Merton) Have you ever experienced a feeling of helplessness and frustration in your spiritual life? Describe.

3. Effort and exertion in the spiritual life are helpful only if we are being led by God; if we are in fact resisting God 's leading, no amount of effort can produce a good result. If you had a spiritual director/counselor and he/she heard you share your present practices, would they describe you as one who is led, or one who is still trying to lead? Why?

How to Start Your Own Practice of Solitude and Silence

(From *Unveiled Faces*, by Keith Drury)

Find a place

If you want to try this discipline...find a place. Do you remember a hide-out you had as a child? Now find one as an adult. Answer this: If I were going to fast from people contact for several hours, where could I go to find solitude?

Schedule a time

Set a nonnegotiable time with God and stick to it.

Keep your expectations sensible

Don't expect wild visions and sparkling insight in a few hours. Just expect to wind down a bit and to sense you are in "God's waiting room."

Keep the focus on God

It is possible to be alone in solitude without sensing that you are in God's presence. Time alone has some benefits, but time alone with God is better.

Seek one important message from God

If you've not been practicing this discipline as a means of grace regularly, don't expect God to unload everything He's wanted to say to you for years in your first hour together. He is more likely to unfold His words to you over time.

Seek moments of solitude in your ordinary day

If you decide to skip this discipline (try hard not to), at least try seeking moments of solitude within your regular daily schedule.



"The soul is like a wild animal – tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy, self-sufficient. It knows how to survive in hard places. But it is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out. But if we will walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently by the base of the tree, and fade into our surroundings, the wild animal we seek might put in an appearance."

Parker Palmer

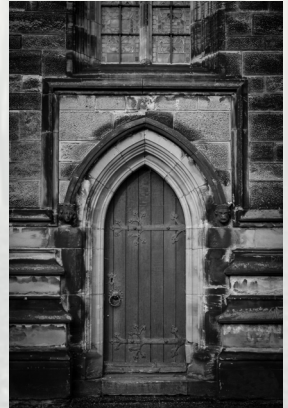
Suggested Exercises

Choose one or more of the following.

1. Set aside fifteen minutes a day for solitude and silence. Relax from strain and stress and simply rest in God's presence.
2. It is important to cultivate an "attitude" in our life before God. Here is a list of eight attitudes that unite us to God: faith, openness, attention, reverence, expectation, supplication, trust, and joy. During your times of reflection, choose one of these attitudes and nurture it by concentrating on offering short simple prayers. For example, in *faith*, simply say, "Lord, I believe in you. I know that you can do all things,"
3. Take an inventory of your "bag of spiritual tricks", such as ingenuity, self-confidence or self-complacence. What magical methods have you relied on in the past, or used as a way of manipulating God? Refuse to come before God with a false sense of control, or confess to God the sin of having reduced your relationship to mere formalism
4. The psalmist pledges, "*I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will keep a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence.*" Make a pledge, by going through a portion of your day in silence. Silence will free you from the compulsion to control others.

"We enter into solitude and silence on the basis of our desire for God, and it becomes a place for being with our desire in God's presence. Even if we also experience some resistance (which is quite normal, especially in the beginning), when the desire is deep enough to overcome our resistance, we are on our way. The most essential question in solitude is 'How have I been wanting to be with God, and how has God been wanting to be with me?'"

Ruth Haley Barton



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