

## The Discipline of Silence and Solitude

1. In a world full of noise, it is hard to be silent. It is hard to find silence. We are uncomfortable with silence. I can remember prayer times when I was a boy. They were predictable and there was some comfort in that...until someone decided to start with a time of silent prayer. I had no idea how long it would last and struggled to start a conversation with God that I knew was going to be interrupted... I just didn't know when.
2. Little did I know that that was just training for the rest of my life. [ONE] This is a noisy world. Advertisements, TV, phones, social media, our schedules – yes, our schedules are noisy. And like being in a room where everyone is playing their music over speakers, other people's schedules can crowd into ours. (so many people interrupted me, I couldn't do my church work...)
3. The thing is, Kingdom work is my job. It's what I do. That gives me a huge advantage over most of you who work in secular jobs. You see, part of my work involves being silent with God. If I find it difficult...and I do... then what hope has an insurance agent or elementary school teacher have?
4. [TWO] So, today, we come to two disciplines that I love but many hate...and that is not a criticism. We are wired in an infinite number of ways. I am wired in a way that makes worship hard. Worship truly is a discipline for me, something that I have to work hard on to do well. For you, worship might be the most natural thing in the world but...solitude? Silence?
5. Let us accept this fact: all of us struggle more with some disciplines than others. A discipline that might be easy for the person next to us can be a struggle for us. So, if solitude and silence are so hard for some of us, perhaps we should look at scripture to see if it is worth the effort.
6. When we look at prayer, I told you that I asked a theologian friend of mine why he prayed and his answer was "Because Jesus did." [THREE] When it comes to silence and solitude, I have the same answer. Because Jesus sought out solitude and was remarkably

silent for someone who had so much to teach us and so little time to make sure it stuck. Read all the red letters. See how long that takes.

7. When we started this series on Christian disciplines, I recommended two books. One of them was Richard Foster's classic "The Celebration of Discipline." For this next bit, I'm giving you Foster's take on Jesus' need for solitude. [FOUR] He starts his chapter with a list (non- exhaustive) of the times Jesus is said to have left the noise behind to speak to God and to hear God's voice in return.
8. We separate from others, not merely because we want to be alone but, rather, to be in a position to hear the divine Whisperer better (as did Elijah). [FIVE] Jesus started his ministry by spending 40 days alone in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). Before he chose the 12, he spent the entire night alone in the desert hills (Luke 6:12). When he received the news of John the Baptist's death, he withdrew from his friends and took a boat to a lonely place apart (Matthew 4:13). After feeding the 5000, Jesus went into the hills alone. Following another night of work, Jesus left before sunrise to go out to a lonely place (Mark 1:35).
9. When the 12 came back from preaching, Jesus told them to "come away by yourselves to a lonely place." (Mark 6:31). Following the healing of a leper, Jesus withdrew to the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:16). With his three closest friends, he sought out a lonely mountain to experience the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). As he prepared to face the cross, he went to the quiet place of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46).
10. And we could go on. Just read the Book of Mark and underline or highlight the times Jesus leaves the group – or attempts to. To be open and honest, I often leave because I am wired that way. I cannot recharge or think unless I am given a lot of time alone. That said, there is another reason to withdraw: Jesus did.
11. [SIX] Dietrich Bonhoeffer said this: "let him who cannot be alone beware of community...Let him who is not in community beware of being alone." There are dangers in avoiding community and there are dangers in avoiding solitude.

12. But solitude is not enough. There also must be silence. There are real and serious dangers in constant noise and constant entertainment. I could go all neuroscience here and talk about how our brains are actually rewiring via devices but...I'd rather stay in the world of the spirit and say that, if we are filling our brains with noise – even amazing and important noise – where is the room for the Spirit to speak to us?
13. And it isn't about NOT listening to the noise. [SEVEN] It is about the positive: the decision to be quiet. The Navajo say "We learn through the ears and not the mouth." Another old proverb quoted by Foster which I was unable to source says "All those who open their mouths close their eyes. (Albert Brown story) [EIGHT] The key is to learn "there is a time to be silent and a time to speak." Ecclesiastes 3:7. James warns us that "the tongue is a fire."
14. Why should we be silent? Because there is a God in heaven and He has spoken. [NINE] (Ecclesiastes 5:2) Let's read that one together. And again. Are you willing to let God speak for you? Don't rush your answer. Think about this: are you willing to let God speak for you?
15. So – to find silence, we need to, first, notice the noise. I want you to consider doing something for yourself: list all the noise you see or hear during the day. You are unlikely to go a whole day before giving up. It is exhausting. And that's the point. [TEN] So..search for the quiet moments life will allow you to have. If you can combine solitude and silence both become easier. (church, park, just after sunset, a mountain sunrise)
16. Kami and I have a routine. I sometimes smile and say it is an "old people" routine." It is just a different version of quiet...but it is not all the quiet we need. (Kara and I in the car) You might not need a place, but, rather, an attitude: learn how to be alone, how to stand alone.
17. And then say this: Dear Father, God above all gods, Lord of life, Lord of every moment, please accept this moment as a sacrifice, as an acknowledgment of Who you are and my willingness to listen to

You.” Note: even if you never hear, you will have shown that you are willing to hear.

18. [ELEVEN] The Shema. “HEAR O Israel.” We must first be willing to hear...and that might mean a willingness to let Jesus be, not only our Saviour, but our Lord.