

Spiritual Disciplines: Solitude & Fellowship, Part 1

Mark Driscoll

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But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places . . .—[Luke 5:16](#) As we study the spiritual disciplines, we learn that there are two sides to every discipline. On one hand, there is a contemplative practice, and on the other, there is a corresponding active practice. A healthy relationship with God involves both being and doing. Subsequently, anyone who practices one aspect of a spiritual discipline without the other becomes increasingly immature and imbalanced in their walk with Jesus. In the next series of posts we will examine the importance of both solitude and fellowship. Speaking of this in his wonderful book, [Life Together](#), German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who was murdered by the Nazis) wrote, “Only in fellowship do we learn to be rightly alone and only in aloneness do we learn to be rightly in fellowship.”

Solitude

Solitude is fasting from people for a prescribed time to connect with God and replenish the soul. Solitude is not a punishment like that inflicted on prisoners, and it is not intended to be indefinite, as practiced by some extremist monks. Instead, solitude is the recognition that just as we need time with those we love to build our relationship, we also need time with Jesus to build our relationship with Him. Like all relationships, this includes using the special times we get with Him to listen to Him as we read Scripture and speak to Him in prayer. Despite the constant pressures family, friends, and fans placed on His time, Jesus’ own life was marked by ongoing times of solitude. The following verses speak of how Jesus often practiced the spiritual discipline of solitude:

- [Matthew 14:23](#) After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone...
- [Mark 6:31](#) Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”
- [Luke 4:42](#) At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place.
- [Luke 5:16](#) But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Jesus used solitude for a multitude of purposes.

- Following His baptism, Jesus spent forty days in solitude preparing for His public ministry ([Matthew 4:1–11](#)).
- Following the beheading of His cousin John the Baptizer, Jesus spent time alone to mourn ([Matthew 14:12–13](#)).

- Jesus used solitude as occasions for intense and focused prayer ([Matthew 14:23](#); [Mark 1:35](#); [Luke 5:16](#)).
- He used solitude to rest after a hard day of work ([Mark 6:31](#)).
- He used solitude as an opportunity to pray and seek the Father's will before choosing the twelve disciples ([Luke 6:12](#)).
- Knowing He was going to be crucified soon, Jesus spent time alone in the Garden of Gethsemane coming to grips with the painful obedience that was required of Him ([Mark 26:36–46](#)).
- Other biblical figures also used solitude for a litany of purposes. Moses spent time alone on the mountain with God in order to receive a word from God, namely the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19–20).
- Isaiah was both saved and sustained by God through his times of solitude with the Lord ([Isaiah 30:15](#)).
- David says that in solitude, God calmed his fears and encouraged his soul ([Psalm 62:1–2, 5](#)).
- Paul spent some three years in varying degrees of solitude being prepared by the Lord for ministry ([Galatians 1:17–19](#)).

Clearly, time alone with God serves innumerable good purposes in our lives. In order to exercise this discipline, you may need to schedule a day of solitude to ensure that this is a regular part of your spiritual life. I do this at least one day a month and find it to be the most important and refreshing part of my life. It enables me to function in the other areas of my life by helping me remain continually connected to Jesus. Find a place that you like to go to. This may mean that you spend a day in God's creation hiking or simply resting. If you are a parent, you may have to get up early or stay up late to get some time to yourself at home.

There are many things you can do during your periods of solitude, including:

1. Nothing
2. Meditate on a short section of Scripture
3. Rest
4. Read long sections of Scripture
5. Pray, including a prayer walk/hike/bike
6. Journal your thoughts
7. Read a good book

Personally, I tend to be a very organized person who uses every minute of every day very efficiently. As the church grows, it is getting increasingly harder to get some time alone without being recognized. I have come up with a plan that works well for me and I will use it as an illustration. I schedule at least one day a month to get away and connect with Jesus. Because every minute of my day is normally scheduled, I don't plan these days but just wake up and go wherever I end up. I do not answer my phone, do not meet with anyone, and usually get out of town. During a few hours of driving I do a lot of praying and sometimes worship God in song by myself. I like to drive until I am out of the city and find a small town or hidden secluded place in God's creation. There, I do whatever I feel like. Sometimes I go for long walks and hikes alone to get fresh air, think, and pray. Sometimes I check into a bed and breakfast and take a nap and

then go out to dinner. And sometimes I don't do anything. An example trip started with a desire to enjoy the sun with the top down in my Jeep. I ended up in a small town called Easton in the mountains and found a national forest. I followed the road until it turned to a dirt path and continued into the forest until I came to the end of the road. I went off-road and followed a rocky old snowmobile path along a river into the middle of nowhere where there was no sign of people and no noise could be heard from anyone. I drove my Jeep through the river and parked on the other side. It was a glorious sunny day and I took my folding chair out of my Jeep and put it in the middle of the river where I sat to eat a hamburger and do nothing for a few hours. I just sat in the river enjoying the sun and solitude, got some time in prayer, and spent time doing nothing by myself and was incredibly refreshed.

Spiritual Disciplines: Solitude & Fellowship, Part 2

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While the introverts love the discipline of solitude and the extroverts struggle with it, the opposite is true with the discipline of fellowship. Fellowship is living life together with Christian brothers and sisters as the church. The first thing the Bible says is “not good” is for us to be alone. This is because even God exists as the Trinitarian community of Father, Son, and Spirit. We are made in His image and likeness and are therefore made for loving community. God intends for us to have fellowship together as His people. In addition to regularly taking times of solitude, we also see in Scripture that Jesus spent considerable amounts of time in community with others. In fact, Jesus spent most of His time in community with His disciples and frequently had dinner in the homes of the people He was befriending. Jesus seemed to have particularly close fellowship with the youngest disciple, John ([John 13:23](#)), the sisters Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus, whom He loved very much ([John 11:5](#)).

The Scriptures often speak of fellowship in community:

- [Mark 12:33](#) “To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”
- [John 13:34–35](#) “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
- [Acts 2:42](#) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
- [Romans 12:10](#) Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.
- [1 John 1:7](#) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
- [Hebrews 10:25](#) Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

It's a common myth that Christianity can be practiced in isolation. It is sin that separates people and it is Jesus who takes sin away so that we can have fellowship. Therefore, one of the primary purposes of the Christian faith is reconciliation—to God and one another through Jesus. Furthermore, much of the Bible itself is written to communities of people, instructing them how to live together in love as God's people. **In fellowship and by God's empowering grace, we can obey the Bible's commands to:**

- Live in harmony with one another ([Romans 12:16](#))
- Love one another ([Romans 13:8](#))
- Accept one another ([Romans 15:7](#))
- Instruct one another ([Romans 15:14](#))
- Greet one another ([Romans 16:16](#))
- Serve one another ([Galatians 5:13](#))
- Be kind and compassionate to one another ([Ephesians 4:32](#))
- Speak to one another ([Ephesians 5:19](#))
- Admonish one another ([Colossians 3:16](#))
- Encourage one another ([Hebrews 3:13](#))
- Spur one another on ([Hebrews 10:24](#))
- Offer hospitality to one another ([1 Peter 4:9](#))

Through the spiritual discipline of solitude, we are reminded that in one regard our relationship with God is intensely personal. God called us to Himself alone, converted us alone, and one day we will die to stand before God alone. Through the spiritual discipline of fellowship, we also see that we have been saved into the community of the church. We are reminded that on the final day when we rise from our graves, we will rise together to be with Jesus forever as a family with our spiritual brothers and sisters and our Father God. **Recommended reading:**

- [Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life](#) (Donald S. Whitney)
- [Celebration of Discipline](#) (Richard Foster)
- [Sacred Pathways](#) (Gary Thomas)
- [Life Together](#) (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)