

Sermon Study Guide

Week #3: Silence & Solitude



Crave: Silence & Solitude

Big Idea:

God's intimate guidance is found in relationship with Him, heard in times of silence and solitude. It's so good, we will find ways to get there and help others do the same.

Our mountain rescue instructor brought us out to Mt. Pisgah in southern Oregon years ago. Compasses in hand we navigated from point to point trying to be the first team to reach the final landmark. After we were comfortable with the compasses and knew how to rely on them, he said, "Ok, now stand on this rock outcropping and read your compass." What? The compass needle wouldn't stay still, spinning and moving one way, then the next. Come to find out that the rock we were on had metal elements in it that threw off the compass' ability to register the earth's magnetic field. The noise of the elements prevented a magnetic north reading, rendering it useless for finding your way.

Our life compass is God and His word. A lot of times I feel like I'm standing on a rock and the compass is spinning because of all the noise of job demands, family, kids, church, friends, finances and more. Staying right there in that spot I cannot get the compass to work.



Do you ever feel "LOST" in the noise and the crowds of life? What are some of the noises that fill your life? Are they all audible?

God invites us to step away from the noise and get to a place of solitude and silence where He can reorient us to True North, to His way for us. It is in that place of solitude that the needle stops spinning and we gain clarity in our relationship with Him. Out of that relationship connection, we find our way too.

The spiritual discipline of solitude, listening to God in silence, undistracted was something Jesus did so that he, the son of God, could clearly commune with His father. So too we need to be in solitude with Him so that until "all we do in word or deed"

would be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Col. 3:11)

Dallas Willard says it this way...

A primary [discipline] is solitude, which must go hand in hand with silence to be complete. In solitude I arrange to be alone, out of human contact, for lengthy periods of time. This allows my inner compass to stop whirling in response to the demands of others. The elasticity and wholeness of my soul is restored as I grow "still and know that God is God." (Ps. 46:10)

Only solitude and silence, extensively practiced at wisely allotted intervals, can take the world off my back and forever release me from both hurry and loneliness. They open the door to productive engagement with other disciplines. I begin to find myself increasingly before God in such a way that he can safely fill me with himself.

The question for me is, how? How can I find the time to do it? What about all my responsibilities? That's just it. I'm on the noisy rock and will stay there unless I make a change. How do you think you can get time away from the noise of life?

What will your life be like if you don't find solitude? What will it be like when you do get times of solitude?

Could we, as a community, creatively make ways for each of us to individually escape to places of solitude? What would that look like?

Dallas Willard Article (optional)...can be read by entire group to remember the road we are traveling.

Live Life to the Full

Appears in *Christian Herald* (U.K.) 14 April 2001.

"Beware that you are not carried away with the error of the lawless and lose your own stability. Instead, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (II Peter 3:17-18)

Is there a path of steady growth in the presence and power of God for the one who has placed their confidence in Jesus? Should we assume that it is God's intention our lives would be increasingly pervaded by the action of his hand, until "all we do in word or deed" would be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"? (Col. 3:11) Is this something we can arrange for, so that the command to grow in grace makes sense?

We are told repeatedly by Paul to put off the old person and to put on the new. How does one do that?

The answer is actually rather simple. One must intend to do it, and then one must sensibly implement the means. Putting on the new person, growing in grace, is something we must do. Appropriate action is the key. True, as Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) But it is also true that if we do nothing it will be without him.

The path of spiritual growth in the riches of Christ is not a passive one. Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude. You have never seen people more active than those who have been set on fire by the grace of God. Paul, who perhaps understood grace better than any other mere human being, looked back at what had happened to him and said: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." (I Cor. 15:10)

As to "means of grace" placed in our hands, well-directed action is the key. The disciplines of the spiritual life are simply practices that prove to be effectual in enabling us to increase the grace of God in our lives.

That grace is, of course, "unmerited favor." But the form it takes is the action of God in our lives and with our actions. If we wish to know more of this and see the deliverance it works in and around us, we must do the things that will bring it to pass. These things are spiritual disciplines or the disciplines for the spiritual life.

A discipline in any area is something in my power that I do to enable me to do what I cannot do by direct effort. This is the general nature of discipline, and there is simply no area of human attainment--from playing a musical instrument, to sports, to speaking a language or being friendly--that does not require discipline.

The need for discipline does not change when we come to all that is involved in walking in the holiness and power of Christ. Would we do the things that Jesus himself did and taught? Then there is a way. It is the way of disciplined grace: discipline under grace and grace in the midst of discipline.

What are some of these disciplines? A primary one is solitude, which must go hand in hand with silence to be complete. In solitude I arrange to be alone, out of human contact, for lengthy periods of time. This allows my inner compass to stop whirling in response to the demands of others. The elasticity and wholeness of my soul is restored as I grow "still and know that God is God." (Ps. 46:10)

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Study and worship, fasting and sacrifice (of time, energy, money), journaling and prayer, confession and service are also among the disciplines. Some disciplines may be freely chosen. But often our circumstances will impose activities on us which, if taken as such, can be marvelous disciplines enabling us to receive extraordinary grace. "Tribulation works patience" is only one illustration of this principle.

But there is no such thing as a complete list of spiritual disciplines, chosen or imposed. Many different activities might be entered into with the aim of finding the manifest grace of God which enables us to do what we cannot do--and be what we cannot be--by direct effort. But the ones that emerge as most beneficial in Christian history should all be considered very seriously.

And of course "what we cannot do by direct effort" covers all that Jesus taught us. We cannot keep his teachings on our own. He never intended it. But by whole life training in the well-known disciplines of the spiritual life we can become inwardly the kinds of persons who naturally (supernaturally of course) do what he said and did. That is how the gift of a holy and powerful life comes to us.

Now disciplines are not law, they are wisdom. We have to learn how to do them, and we always fail at the outset. But to fail here is not to sin. The sin would be in not adopting and following up on a wise program of disciplines under grace. For then we are not really intending to do what Jesus said. We are planning to fail.

Also, disciplines are for disciples--apprentices--of Jesus, not for dabblers or mere consumers of religious services. They are for people who intend to learn from Jesus how to live their whole lives in the kingdom of God as he would live their lives if he were they. Such people are serious about this and will not be denied.

Thus they are prepared to experiment and learn from their failures until, under their constant teacher, they find that disciplines truly are full of grace and strength.

Fasting becomes feasting on God, meditation on scripture becomes celebration. Religion is no longer an additional burden to be carried in an already overburdened life, but is replaced by a joyous confidence that God is present and prevailing in every situation of life and death.