

Solitude Message

(Part 2)

Last time we talked about the predicament we are in as 21st century followers of Christ. The predicament can be described like this.

God desires a deep and intimate relationship with you and with me. He has wired us to be able to connect with him and one of the most powerful means of connecting with God is through times of solitude or quiet. Psalm 46:10 says "Be still and know that I am God."

However, we live in a world that is filled with noise and busy schedules and fast-paced living. That, my friend is a predicament.

So, let's now begin to talk about how we can infuse the practice of solitude into our lives. Let's talk about the

THE PRIORITY OF SOLITUDE

"Who is he who will devote himself to be close to me? declares the Lord."
Jeremiah 30:21b (NIV)

It takes devotion. This doesn't happen accidentally.

The supreme example of this devotion and priority is Jesus.

Mark 1:32-38 (NIV)

"That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. [33] The whole town gathered at the door, [34] and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

[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. [36] Simon and his companions went to look for him, [37] and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

[38] Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

3 Observations from the life of Jesus

1. Jesus made solitude a priority in spite of and because of demanding pressures

In this scene we find Jesus right in the middle of an intense season of ministry. After the sun had gone down, it says in verse 33 says that the whole town gathered at the door. The Bible says that he healed people and he also cast out many demons. It is what we expect of Him. He is the Son of God, and we know that he didn't come to serve but to be served and give his life for us.

In fact, it is not surprising that in the very next verse we read the words "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house". Again, He is the Son of God. We expect him to get up early before dark and leave the house to begin another day of busy ministry. I expect that he will look and see his palm pilot is full of ministry appointments for the day.

After all, he only has 3 years of public ministry. That is not much time to start a movement that will turn the world upside down. You would think his strategy would be to press the flesh for 3 years. Travel as much as possible, see as many people as possible, preach as many times as possible, develop an organizational plan, and raise up as many leaders as possible.

However, we might be shocked to know that after we read "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place where he prayed."

Let's talk about that phrase "solitary place". Where do you have to go to have a meaningful time of solitude?

2. Jesus chose a variety of places and times for solitude

Anyone, anywhere, anytime. Solitude is more about the heart than it is the physical location.

You just need a few minutes alone. It could be in your car, it could be in your home or backyard, it could be in a quiet booth at a restaurant. When we go into solitude we are withdrawing temporarily from conversation, noise, distractions, deadlines and the constant bombardment of stimulation.

Where are some places in the routine of your life that you could be alone with the Lord?

3. Jesus made solitude a priority because he needed it

He went off by himself. Doesn't he know there is still much to do. This is evidenced by the fact that Peter and his friends come looking for Jesus. When they find him, Peter says "Everyone is looking for you." You are needed.

But Jesus knew that his spiritual lifeline was time alone in the presence of His Father. That was the source of his strength, perspective, and direction. You see, life has a way of draining your soul. It is in solitude that God replenishes and renews us. It is in solitude that we rediscover that in grace I am unconditionally loved and accepted and I don't have to try to find my importance from the world. It is in solitude that I discover the father's heart and can begin to now align my heart to the things that are important to him. It is in solitude that God gives me direction for the future.

Solitude invites God's voice and purposes into my life.

The goal of solitude is not so much to unplug from my crazy world as it is to change frequencies so that I can hear the Father. Richard Foster has said "Solitude doesn't give us the power to win the rat race, but to ignore it altogether."

Interestingly, when Peter finds Jesus during his time of solitude and says everyone is looking for you, Jesus responds by saying "Let us go somewhere else so I can preach there also." Clearly, during that time of solitude God now directs the ministry of Christ to new villages.

As you walk your way through the gospels you will discover this thread of solitude that runs consistently through the life of Jesus. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus went off for an extended time of fasting and prayer. In Matthew 14, after Jesus hears of the death of John the Baptist he got in a boat and went off to a solitary place. When he was going to choose his disciples, he went off to be alone with the Father.

If we want to be Christlike we will make it a priority to regularly withdraw and learn how to linger in the presence of the one who created us for His pleasure.

"In order to grow in grace, we must be much alone. It is not in society that the soul grows most vigorously. In one single quiet hour of prayer it will often make more progress than in days of company with others. It is in the desert that the dew falls freshest and the air is purest." Andrew Bonar

THE PLAN FOR SOLITUDE

It will take some work and cultivation.

The idea of cultivation and exercise, so dear to the saints of old, has no place in our total religious picture. It is too slow, too common. . . We read our chapter, have our devotions and run away, hoping to make up for our deep inward bankruptcy. A.W. Tozer

Psalm 143:5-10 (NIV)

*I remember the days of long ago;
I meditate on all your works
and consider what your hands have done.
[6] I spread out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.
[7] Answer me quickly, O Lord;
my spirit fails.
Do not hide your face from me
or I will be like those who go down to the pit.
[8] Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,
for I have put my trust in you.
Show me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.
[9] Rescue me from my enemies, O Lord,
for I hide myself in you.
[10] Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God;
may your good Spirit
lead me on level ground.*

As we think about solitude this passage becomes a kind of template that breaks down into 3 simple segments—past, present, and future.

1. REFLECTING ON THE PAST -- v.5 *“I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.”*

Much of solitude is about taking the Word of God discovering the character and person of God in his word. I think it is helpful as you pick up your Bible to have the attitude which says “Lord, I come to your word to meet you. These are not just old stories or something on my to do list. These pages reveal you and your heart. I want to know you.”

It is not just the words that nourish the soul, but God himself as he meets you there. The Bible is not an end in itself, it is a means to bring us to an intimate and fulfilling depth in our relationship with God.

“I meditate on all your works”—Meditate is giving attention with intention.

It is lingering. It is carefully processing. Remember, the goal is not to get through all the verses but to spend time with your Father.

If you are not used to meditating, you may find it difficult to keep your mind from wandering. That is quite normal, so don't feel that you are unspiritual. This is a discipline that must be learned, but one that has unbelievable benefit and power in your life.

2. REFILLING FOR THE PRESENT v.6-8a

The Psalmist now from the historical to the personal

Have an attitude of honesty

“I spread out my hands to you”—This is not just reflecting on the past, but now moves to today. Spreading out the hands was an indication of openness and searching and surrender.

“my soul thirsts for you”—one thing we want to develop is this kind of hunger for God. Honestly, it may not be there at this time. That's OK. Just tell God that you want to want Him.

Have an attitude of expectancy

“let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love.”—There is a sense of expectation that God will show up.

The universal presence is a fact. God is here. The whole universe is alive with His life. And He is no stranger or foreign God, but the familiar Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whose love has for these thousands of years enfolded the sinful race of men. And always He is trying to get our attention, to reveal Himself to us, to communicate with us. We have within us the ability to know Him if we will but respond to his overtures. And this we call pursuing God. A.W. Tozer

This verse also indicates that I need fresh portions of his presence and love. I cannot rely on last month's supply. I need regular and fresh encounters that my soul might be filled and replenished.

3. REALIGNING FOR THE FUTURE – v. 8b-10

“Show me the way I should go”—the more time I spend with him in solitude the more I will be able to discern his “still, small voice”. I will better be able to discern his promptings and leadings.

“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.” --It is not only about hearing the voice of God in solitude but then obeying.

“May your good Spirit lead me on level ground”—Knowing God intimately puts you on level ground. How many Christians do we know whose life resembles a roller coaster? Life and circumstances take them for a wild ride. They are up one moment and down the next. I think that part of what solitude accomplishes is that stabilizes me so that I am not tossed around.