

Maturing toward Wholeness in the Inner Life ***Session Five: Solitude and Silence***

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." – Jesus (Luke 6:40)

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Wholeness in the inner life is Christlikeness in the inner life.
It develops as we allow Jesus to teach us how to live.

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1 – I can expect that at some point in my Christian walk I will come to long to go deeper with God. What I have experienced thus far will have left me unsatisfied. There may be unwanted behaviors that I have been unable to change. But I will need help to know how to proceed. Solitude and silence offer a powerful and time-tested next step.

2 – In solitude and silence I withdraw, for a period of time, from social contact, physical movement, and sounds (except perhaps the gentle sounds of nature). I present my time and myself to God as a love offering to Him. In quietness and stillness I allow my soul to come to rest and clarity. I ask the Holy Spirit to grace me with insight. I listen for the healing word Jesus is always ready to speak. I obey.

3 – Solitude and silence have, for millennia, shaped the inner lives of our fathers and mothers in the faith:

- **Moses:** God placed Moses in the desert for forty years. He took the Moses, formed in the household and court of Pharaoh, and transformed him into a Moses shaped in hiddenness in the Presence of God. God was preparing Moses to become one of the most influential leaders in history.

(Note: We may feel that being still before God is a waste of time—there is so much we must accomplish! But Judeo-Christian history repeatedly shows that those who have been with God, although accomplishment was not their motivation, have lived exceptionally productive and influential lives.)

- **David:** David's "desert" was the pasturelands where he tended his flocks. During seasons of solitude God imparted to him the spiritual insight from which the foundations of Judeo-Christian worship (the psalms) sprang. In spite of his failures, David became a man after God's own heart.

- **Elijah:** Elijah was also formed in hiddenness, and God felt safe to entrust to him amazing spiritual authority. God used Elijah to turn Israel back to Him during its worst season of apostasy—1 Kings 16:29-33. But note: Elijah was a person with a nature just like ours—James 5:17!
- **John the Baptist:** God took this anointed servant and placed him in obscurity until the day of his public appearance to Israel—Luke 1:80. Like Elijah, without religious position, social standing, organizational backing or financial resources, he led a spiritual movement of far-reaching influence. His only qualification was the hand of God upon him.
- **Jesus:** Like John, Jesus spent His formative years away from the limelight. In preparation to be tested by Satan, He withdrew into the stillness of the desert. Afterward He regularly retreated into solitude, emerged for ministry, and then retreated again—Mark 1:35; 3:14; 6:31; Luke 6:12; 22:39-41. The Son of God “learned obedience”—Hebrews 5:8.
- **Paul:** After this Hebrew of the Hebrews was confronted by Christ on the road to Damascus, he had much inner healing and re-formation to work through. For this, God led him to the desert of Arabia where he spent an extended time in solitude. Later, removed from his usual activities by imprisonment, he undertook the most fruitful activity of his life: writing.
- **Anthony of Egypt:** During the 3rd and 4th centuries the church in the Roman Empire was increasingly pressured by a violent and hedonistic culture (one very much like our own). Anthony and those with him withdrew to the solitude of the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine, refusing to allow the culture to form them. In stillness they sought intimacy with God and insight into His ways.
- **Desert Fathers and Mothers:** As with John the Baptist, crowds flocked to the desert to receive spiritual wisdom from Anthony and the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Their influence gave birth to monasticism, one of the most transforming movements of Christian history. Anthony and his companions are heirs to the apostolic legacy of John, the one who leaned on Jesus’ breast. “He who leans on Jesus’ breast hears the heart of God.”

In What Ways Are Solitude and Silence So Powerful?

1 – **They assist me in distancing myself from the influences of the intensity of activity and noise all around me.** Our culture preaches a gospel of “doing” and “achieving”. These, without the counterbalancing capacity to be quiet before God, war against my soul. Compulsive busyness is a primary cause of inner unhealthiness.

2 – **They offer me entry into the healing silences of God.** Solitude and silence position me to hear my Father say to me, “I love you.” Hearing this from Him is foundational to my inner healing. My compulsivities are

energized by a search to meet my deep need to be loved. Other people, in the end, are unable to meet this need—it is too great. But God can, and will!

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. – Psalm 62:1

3 – **They give my body the rest it needs.** And this, in turn, increases my ability to hear God. Only God knows what percentage of the physical illness around us is due to the stresses disobedience inflicts on the body. The soul is disordered, and the body is used in unhealthy ways in attempts to relieve the inner pain. God worked for six days; then He rested. He told us to do likewise. We are created in His image—we are made like Him.

4 – **They create space for insightful meditation on the Scriptures.** This in turn yields godly wisdom and deeper insight into myself. Why do I do the things I do? I live from my depths, much of which I am not in touch with and do not understand. This can change!

5 – **They give opportunity to listen for what God wants to say to me.** One cause of my difficulty in hearing God: my daily busyness keeps me distracted. It drowns out His voice. God waits for me to make the necessary choices to come present to Him—God is waiting for me!

Achtung! We are not speaking here of introspection. In introspection my focus is on me. This only leads to further confusion and wounding. It is pervasive in our narcissistic (self-centered) culture. I gain true understanding of myself, not by looking at myself, but by looking at God and listening for what He is saying. Then I obey.

6 – **They foster inner clarity.** The soul is like a spring of water in the forest. A traveler comes by, and with a stick stirs up the clear water. Now the spring is muddy and filled with leaves, sticks, and other objects. (That is what my busyness does to my soul.) For the water to become clear again, it must be left alone, and given time for the mud, leaves and sticks to settle to the bottom. Solitude and silence give space for my soul to come to clarity.

7 – **They are the answer to loneliness.** Some fear solitude and silence will increase feelings of loneliness. In reality, it is in solitude that I discover the profound reality that I am never alone.

How to Spend a Day (or minutes, or hours) in Solitude and Silence

1 – **In the biblical view, a new day begins at sundown.** “And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.” In Jewish practice the Sabbath is ushered in by Friday evening’s meal. A helpful practice in shaping an orderly life: we use the time following the evening meal and before going to bed to prepare for the next day.

2 – **We go to bed early, and sleep until we are rested.** Our body and soul are deeply intertwined. A rested body plays an important role in being able to come present to God and hear him accurately.

3 – **We normally awake in a condition of solitude and silence.** Sleep is a provision from God for the restoring of our body and soul. During the night we have been experiencing extended relief from the assaults of noise and busyness. Upon waking, we want to extend that condition.

4 – **We select a pre-determined place and prepare it.** If possible, we move from getting up, to breakfast, to this place with minimum interruption. We look for somewhere away from intrusive noises. Enjoy being there! An extra cup of coffee, or a snack for later on, might be helpful.

5 – **Solitude and nature go well together.** Extended times in nature are restful and healing. Nature is not rebelling against the rule of its Creator.

6 – **There are two movements in solitude and silence** and in disciplines for the spirit in general. In union with our Heavenly Father, we first want to abstain (to be emptied) from that which can be toxic to our souls. Then we want to impart (to take in) to our inner lives that which heals and restores.

7 – **We fast from phone, email and internet.** Once we are checking email or phone messages we are no longer in solitude. But, especially during periods of taking in, worship music accessed via earphones can be beneficial.

8 – **We don't bring work with us.** Time set apart for solitude is not for working on our "to do" list. There will be other times for that. Once we are doing work we are no longer in solitude.

9 – **We practice doing nothing.** This is itself a major discipline. Many find the very idea difficult, even frightening. Busyness has deeply affected us. As we enter into rest, the condition of our soul becomes increasingly accessible to us. Extended periods of solitude allow us to go deeper into the silence.

10 – **Once we notice the sediments that cloud our soul beginning to settle,** and the water becoming clear again, the time may be coming to take in, to receive. A specific area of personal need may have been clarified for us, and we may want to seek the Lord further about it. It may be right now to practice other disciplines such as meditation, prayer, study or journaling.

11 – **We ask the Holy Spirit to guide us. We rely on Him.** There is no right or wrong way to enter into solitude and silence. We can't "do it wrong". We have time. We just make ourselves available to God, and be receptive.

12 – **We consider what rhythm we might want solitude and silence to have in our lives** (1) daily (2) weekly (3) monthly (4) quarterly and/or (5) annually. We schedule in advance and make arrangements accordingly.