

Renovation

Solitude, Silence, Simplicity

“The soul is restless until it finds its rest in Thee.” Augustine

The Disciplines of solitude, silence, and simplicity are countercultural. Why? Because we live in a society that is enslaved by all that opposes them. For example, despite our culture’s emphasis upon individualism and freedom of expression, we’re consumed with what others think of us and invest a tremendous amount of time in building relationships. To ensure we’re not distracted by the stark realities of our inner selves, we immerse our minds with sights and sounds that drown out the silence of our hearts and become intoxicated with “noise.” Consumerism is really another word for “addiction.” We’re addicted to faster, higher, louder, and bigger, better, and more complex gadgets that promise to add comfort and convenience, yet often do nothing more than complicate our frenetic lifestyles. The Disciplines of solitude, silence, and simplicity *are* countercultural.

Solitude

Solitude is the temporary practice of spatial and relational distance from other things and from other humans that could potentially distract us from hearing God and being near to him. “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” (Jm 4:8).

- *In solitude we’re not merely alone with ourselves.* Instead, we’re alone *with God.* As Jesus enters the world he is “Immanuel, (which means, God with us)” and as he leaves this world he promises “I am *with you* always” (Mt 1:23; 28:20; see also Ps 23:4; 139:7-10).
- *Solitude gives us a chance to empty ourselves of all else so we can be full of God’s presence and prepare ourselves for ministry.* Consider Rom 15:13 “May the God of hope *fill you* with all joy and peace as you trust in him” (also, Col 1:9). Both Paul and Jesus had a desert experience to prepare themselves for ministry (Gal 1:15-17; Mt 4).
- *In solitude we learn that we do not need others as much as we think.* Instead solitude teaches us to rely on God for our deepest relational needs. And, solitude gives others a chance to realize they don’t need us as much as they think. Ps 4:8, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”
- *In solitude we have a chance to recognize our fears and uncertainties and experience a unique joy and contentment,* which are often eclipsed when we’re around others. “Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy” (Pr 14:10, NIV).
- *Jesus spent time in solitude...*
 - To draw strength from His Father’s presence (cf., Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35; Lk 4:42)
 - To discern the Father’s will (Lk 6:12-13)
 - To avoid misunderstanding and misguided enthusiasm (Jn 6:15)

Silence

To Consider: “Silence is frightening because it strips us as nothing else does.” (Dallas Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines).

Silence is the willful choice to quiet every voice but One...God’s. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10). “Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling” (Zech 2:13).

- *Silence frees us from the temptation to control people or circumstances with our words.* When we’re silent, we tacitly agree to trust God and wait for him, just as Jesus did. Consider 1 Pt 3:16, “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” Jesus knew the words of Isaiah “in quietness and in trust shall be your strength” (Is 30:15).
- *Silence disarms the weapons of our duplicity;* namely, the “words” that wage war in relationships. How often have you said one thing but meant another in an effort to hide your true thoughts and feelings? Silence strips us of deceit and forces us to remain honest. There is nothing dishonest

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about silence. Pr 10:19, “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”

- *In silence we express our hope and trust in God rather than take matters into our own hands.* “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation...For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.” Ps 62:1, 5. “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (Ps 37:7).
- *Silence gives us the time to consider our words carefully so our mouths don’t unexpectedly “erupt.”* Jm 1:26 “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.”
- *In silence the doorway to our heart is opened to receive the healing touch of God’s love.* “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love” (Zeph 3:17).
- *Silence provides opportunity to respect others’ need to be heard.* Jm 1:19, “let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak.”

Simplicity

To Consider: “Because — and to the degree that — we lack a divine Centre our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things.” Richard Foster

Simplicity is the Discipline of gaining control over or removing altogether unnecessary distractions, vain attachments, or superfluous relationships that hinder our clear and focused walk with God.

- *Simplicity forces us to identify and confront the volume of things we acquire in life that may hinder our spiritual fruitfulness.* It is often true that the more we have, the more complex our lives become. “Lay up for your self treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys” (Mt 6:20; see also 1 Tim 6:17-19).
- *The Discipline of simplicity frees us from our attachment to things and connects us to God as the sole Supplier of our contentment.* “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” (1 Tim 6:6-8).
- *Simplicity helps us see the value of a few deep relationships, rather than the width and often shallowness of many.* “A friend loves at all times” (Pr 17:17). Or, “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Pr 27:5-6).

Reflection/Direction/Decision

- Silence and Solitude liberate us from the fragility of human relationships so we can connect with the stability of our divine relationship with God. What human relationship can you identify in your life that might need the liberation of solitude and silence? What will you do to build these Disciplines into your life?
- Take your Bible to a quiet place of solitude and turn to Mt 6:19-34. Read this passage aloud and, as you do, imagine Jesus looking at you while he speaks these words. Although he may not be visually present, Jesus is spiritually present and is speaking to you. As a mature believer, don’t just feel guilty; feel responsible! Identify any area in your life that needs to be uncluttered and ask God to help you make the necessary adjustments.
- Memorize Philippians 3:7-8. What applications can you make concerning the Discipline of simplicity (Hint: Note the single point of focus for Paul)?
- When was the last time you said nothing when others reviled you?
- Can you remember when you last identified and confronted unhealthy attitudes and thoughts? If not, then consider practicing the Disciplines of solitude and silence.