



# Shaping the Heart

## Spiritual Formation & the Christian Life

*"The soul is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." – Augustine*

*The disciplines of solitude and silence are countercultural. Why? Because we live in a society that is enslaved by all that opposes them. For example, despite our culture's ideological emphasis on individualism and personal freedom of expression, we are enamored with what others think of us. To ensure we are not distracted by the stark realities of our inner selves, we immerse ourselves with sights and sounds that drown out the silence of our hearts. We become intoxicated by and addicted to the cultural "noise" that surrounds us. Immersed in social media, email, cell phones, text messages, etc., we have every opportunity to avoid every chance at being alone. Working against these intense, perennial choruses of clamor and clatter, the disciplines of solitude and silence free us from this cultural, audible, and social captivity.*

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### **Solitude**

*Solitude is the intentional, temporary practice of spatial and relational distance from any place or person 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).*

The discipline of solitude does not entail being alone; it is being present only to one Other. Solitude is a subtraction of all visual, audible, and spatial distractions. It is the awareness of and sole focus on the One in whom "we live and move and have our being" (**Acts 17:28**). Solitude is isolation without seclusion – others are temporarily shut out in order to let in God's presence. Solitude is retreat without privacy – we temporarily withdraw from the world to find sanctuary in God's presence.

### *The Value of Solitude*

- *In solitude, we're not merely alone with ourselves. Instead, we're alone with God. As Jesus enters this world he is "Immanuel, (which means, God with us)" and as he leaves this world his last words are "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. 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 identify and confront our fears and our uncertainties and find strength in God's presence. When we're around others, the chatter and residual noise that comes from their lives often eclipses our worries and doubts so we are unable to recognize them. "Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy" (Pr 14:10).*

### *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 his Father's will (Lk 6:12-13)
- To avoid misunderstanding and misguided enthusiasm (Jn 6:15; note the "again," ESV, NASB, NRSV, NIV, HCSB)



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### Silence

*"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). "It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam 3:26).*

#### *The Value of Silence*

- *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, our "words" that often wage war in relationships. How often have you said one thing but meant another in an effort to hide your true thoughts or feelings? Silence strips us of deceit and forces us to remain honest. There is nothing dishonest 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 helps us pause and 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). It is in our "loss for words" that we find the voice of God's love. *Selah.**
- *Silence provides opportunity to hear and respect others' need to be heard. Jm 1:19 "let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak." Why? Because the needs of others cannot be met before they are expressed. If you are busy talking or thinking about what you're going to say as others speak, then the only voice in a conversation is yours.*

*The 17th century philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) made this startling observation: "I have often said that the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." Pensées, 139.*

*Like no other disciplines, silence and solitude expose our heart's deepest longings; they liberate us from the fragility of this life and help us connect with the stability of our eternal life with God.*