

Silence and Solitude

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[0:00] This afternoon is going to be short and sweet. I know it's going to be short, and I hope it's going to be sweet for you. I've been praying that you would be encouraged by what we hear this afternoon.

On these Sunday afternoons, we've been doing a series called Aspects of Spirituality. And by that we mean these are ways that we enjoy, that we drink in God.

And every Christian here can say with David from Psalm 63, Oh God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you.

My body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water. And brothers and sisters, haven't you felt that this week?

You've been away from home. This world is not our home. And I'm not happy here. I'm not satisfied with this world. But that I could have God.

[1:03] That is what I long for, that the holy, beautiful, radiant God would take me up and satisfy me. Everywhere I look is sand, and I need God.

That was what David's heart was. And I think if you've been born again, that is your heart too. So this series is about sitting down at the well with Jesus and drinking the water from his hands.

It's about putting that full glass of cold, clear water to your lips and drinking until you're satisfied.

And if that sounds good, then let's see how Jesus quenched his desire for God.

So turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 5. And we're going to look at verse 15 and 16. Luke chapter 5, verse 15 and 16.

The context is Jesus just cured a man with leprosy, and he told him to not tell anyone. This is where we pick up the reading in Luke 5, verse 15.

[2:16] Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

So today we're going to be talking about silence and solitude. And by silence and solitude, I mean taking time in order to be with God, to be alone with God, without the interruption of other people.

And let me repeat that. By silence and solitude, I mean taking time in order to be alone with God, without the interruption of other people. And I have four points, and then we'll be done.

And the first point is a question. And I want to ask, why did Jesus seek solitude? Why did Jesus often withdraw to lonely places?

And the easy answer is prayer. He wanted to pray. Jesus needed to pray. Have you thought of that? Have you thought of that?

[3:28] Jesus needed to pray. Jesus felt the need to pray. And if the Psalms are a reflection of our Lord's heart and his experience, then just imagine Jesus saying the words of Psalm 63 that we just read.

Oh, God, you are my God. Earnestly, I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water. That was Jesus' heart cry.

And so if anyone knew the experience of dryness, of the desert-like condition of this world, then Jesus knew it. We often find satisfaction, don't we, in the things of this world.

We're satisfied with those broken cisterns that Jeremiah talks about. We'll crawl down into the cistern. And we'll get on our hands and knees and scoop up the water in the mud puddle at the bottom.

And we'll find some satisfaction there. But Jesus never could do that. Everywhere he looked, it was a desert except in God.

[4:36] And he was as human as human could be. And so his soul longed and cried out for God. And so those hours of solitude that Luke records must have been really sweet to our Lord.

He could finally give himself to thinking and dwelling on God and speaking to him. See, Jesus was just as dependent on God as you and I are.

And he knew it better than you and I ever will. He knew he was dependent. So remember Jesus' words, I can do nothing on my own.

John 5 verse 30. Or I can do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.

John 8 verse 28. So you hear Jesus' childlike dependence on his Father.

He needed his Father. He needed these hours of loneliness. Because he needed to talk to his Father about what he should say and what he should do next.

[5:44] So Jesus sought silence and solitude because he was just like you. He didn't multitask very well. And I don't say that in any way to dishonor him.

But he was a human. And humans have a very difficult time focusing on more than one thing at a time. And so as he was preaching, as he was healing these sick people that were coming to him, he was in constant communion with God.

I'm not saying that. But his undivided attention couldn't be given to his Father. And so Jesus needed those hours of undivided attention without interruption, without people speaking, without people needing him.

Because if he didn't do that, he couldn't keep up the busy schedule that he had set. And Jesus sought solitude because he was so busy.

He needed space. He needed space in his life to maintain the intimacy that he had with his Father. Because the power to serve, the power to heal, the power to obey, all those things came from his Father as he had communion and that connection with him.

[7:05] And so Jesus was human as much as he was divine. And that means he was dependent. And so he needed these hours of silence and solitude. And he needed to enjoy God if his soul was going to be nourished.

So Jesus needed silence and solitude for another reason. Because this was a part of the way that he set himself apart, that he sanctified himself for us. Do you remember in John 17, 19, Jesus said this, For them I sanctify myself, that they too may truly be sanctified.

So Jesus set himself apart to God in order that we could be set apart to God. And so Jesus set himself apart throughout his life.

He gave himself to God. And it was especially in these hours of loneliness and quietness where he could give himself to God, that he set himself to God, that he would be holy, that he would be a sacrifice that could save us.

So in those hours of loneliness, in those hours of quietness, Jesus was working out our salvation. He was giving himself to God in order that he could be the perfect lamb that could take away our sins.

[8:25] And you see that pattern throughout his life. Do you remember how his ministry began? He was baptized and immediately he went into the desert to be tempted, to be alone, to dedicate himself to God in prayer and fasting.

And when John the Baptist died, Jesus again went out and was alone. And the night before he chose the twelve disciples, where was he? He spent the whole night alone in prayer.

Every part of his ministry, every new part of his ministry was marked by this time of silence and solitude and prayer. He was sanctifying himself.

He was giving himself again to God because he was doing what was necessary to save us. And then on the final night, he went with his disciples into the garden of Gethsemane.

And remember, he went on and he was alone. And now was the crucial hour. Now was the hour where the question would be answered, would he turn away?

[9:34] Would he take the cup that his father was giving him? Would he fulfill his ministry? And it was in those quiet hours of loneliness and uninterrupted solitude where he poured out his heart in anguish to God, where he was beginning and he took the cup into his hands in order to rescue us.

So Jesus sought silence and solitude because it was the place of his strength. It was where he gathered strength and it was there his soul was refreshed. It was there where he had intimacy with God and where he set himself apart to God.

Now, secondly, I have another question. Why do we desperately need silence and solitude? Well, why do we need silence and solitude?

And we need silence and solitude for the same reasons that Jesus Christ needed them. Because it's in those uninterrupted hours that we have intimacy, that we're refreshed, that we're strengthened, that we can focus our undivided attention on our father.

And solitude is the place where we sanctify ourselves unto God, just like Jesus did. And if Jesus needed those hours, how much more do you need those hours?

[11:00] You're a sinner and you have a flesh that is enmity to God. You have a flesh that is telling you to stay away from God, that is drawing you away from God.

And so how can you ever hope to have intimacy, closeness with God unless you exert serious effort, concerted effort, to focus your attention on God?

Where you'll foster closeness with God. And husbands and wives, you know that. Because if you're married, you understand how intimacy works.

That intimacy needs space. Closeness needs space to develop. See, you can't stay close with your husband or your wife if you're just running, running, always, always running errands.

And you're running yourself ragged. And you're taking the kids here and there. And what happens to that intimacy of that marriage relationship? It starts to fall apart.

[12:04] Intimacy is lost. And you know, it's not just being together where intimacy happens. You can sit and watch TV and watch a hundred movies together and not feel any closer.

Because what intimacy needs is silence. It needs without interruptions. It needs no internet. No movies. No children.

It needs space and peace and quiet. So you can watch a hundred movies with your spouse. And there's more intimacy to be found in that one date where you are looking at her and she is looking at you.

And then you realize why you loved her in the first place. And you fall in love all over again. And then there's intimacy. And you grow close. Well, brothers, sisters, it's the same thing with God and you.

So do you want intimacy with God? Then find times and places where you can be alone with him. You need times where your kids aren't bothering you. You need times where your husband or your wife is not bothering you.

[13:18] Where your roommate is not there. Where there's peace and quiet and solitude. And you know that.

I know you know that. So don't... If you're struggling, you're struggling to find time and you're struggling to make this a habit, then don't take this as one more thing that you have to do.

Okay? Don't take this as one more thing that I have to put on my schedule. I don't want... If you're struggling, I don't want you to feel bad. Like, I have to do this and now I'm feeling guilty about it. This is not a law. This is an invitation. God is inviting you to a feast. He's inviting you to himself. See, God made you to know him. God saved you to know him. And God is still offering himself to you.

[14:18] And he's still saying, come, eat and drink and be satisfied. Come, be alone with me. And the world is hectic. Our American culture is one of the worst places to try to find silence and solitude.

It's such a hurried, chaotic, oppressive thing. And you are run ragged. I know. And you're busy, just like Jesus.

And you need those hours of quiet, just like he did. Where it's just you and God. And you can give yourself to him. Say, Abba.

Abba, Father, I need you. I'm tired. I need you. So come just as you are. Come messy. This is a feast where you don't have to wash up.

You can just come as you are. And you can come stressed out. And so don't say, I'm too scatterbrained for this. I can't do it. There's too many things going on. Don't paralyze yourself waiting until you're calm.

[15:19] Jesus said, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. See, Jesus wants you just as you are.

He wants you frazzled and all out of sorts. And he wants to give you rest. And he wants to develop that intimacy with you. So this isn't a burden.

This discipline isn't something hard. This is a feast. He's inviting you to it. So everything in you and everything around you is going to rise up and fight against this.

Our culture is a very noisy, very interrupted culture. We get in our cars. And I wouldn't want you to raise your hand if I ask you how many of you instantly turn on the radio.

Or maybe the radio is already on. The radio is on when we're driving. And some of you young people, you go to sleep with your iPods in your ears. You cannot stand the silence because of how the culture has raised you, trained you.

[16:29] And so people are constantly IMing and texting and emailing. And we feel this need like, I have to respond to everyone. I have to be in constant contact with everyone and everything.

I have to know what's going on or I'm going to lose something. And we have to learn that if we want intimacy with God, we have to learn to say no to that. We have to learn to say no to the noise.

And we have to learn to say no to people. Jesus said no to people in order to be alone with his father. Jesus said no to people so that he could have intimacy with God.

Now, Jesus learned in the school of solitude. And that is a place where we need to enroll as well.

That's a school that we need to go to. One old writer said, solitude is a school that few want to learn in, but few instruct us better. Well, why do we need solitude?

[17:32] Because it's in the place of solitude where we learn lessons that we can never learn with people talking to us, with lots of people around. Now, you could read a book on prayer.

And you could learn how to pray by hearing a sermon. But it's in the quiet place where you learn to pray. It's there when you learn to lay hold of God, where you fasten on to some promise, and you learn what it means to have dealings with God.

That lesson is only learned in solitude. And it's in the school of solitude where we learn to worship. Like I just said, we could hear a sermon or we could read a book on how to worship, but it's in the quiet place where you learn to worship, where God in all of his magnificence is raised before your eyes with sufficient strength, where you learn to praise him for his glory and grace, and where you take a psalm and you really make it your own.

It's not anything on the surface of the page any longer. Or you've made it your own. It's in the place of solitude where that happens. It's in the school of solitude where doctrine becomes conviction.

There's all sorts of people that know all sorts of things about doctrine. But it's in solitude where truth becomes conviction. It's where that truth puts grooves on your heart that no man can erase.

[19:02] And it's in the quiet place that God becomes real. And his word becomes real. And his word comes alive. And you see that to live is Christ.

That is only in the quiet place. We learn how to live our lives there. Moms and dads, how will you ever raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord if in the quiet place you have not learned to fear God?

In the school of solitude, we learn the value of silence. When we're all by ourselves and quiet, we learn how much of our speech is totally unnecessary.

James said, be slow to speak and quick to listen. And we will never be quick to listen if we haven't learned to be quiet. Well, we desperately need to enroll in the school of solitude.

We need to learn her lessons. So solitude is the place of strength for the Christian. It's the place of intimacy. It's where we come and have dealings with God.

[20:10] And so, that's why we need it. That's where we learn to fall in love all over again. If you're discouraged here, the temptation is to try something else.

I just need to get away from this thing for a while. I just need to get away from Christianity. I just don't want to read my Bible anymore. If I can just get away from it, maybe I can find that old fire or something that goes through our minds.

And that's the wrong way to go. It's by going into the secret place. With that intimacy, that closeness, the affection, where we fall in love all over again happens.

Well, we've asked why Jesus needed solitude and why we need solitude. Thirdly, let's talk about some first steps in order to enjoy more solitude.

So, what are some first steps that we can take to just enjoy more solitude? And we have just three first steps here. Number one, examine your life.

[21:16] Ask yourself, what can go? What can go? Are my priorities straight? Martha is busy, busy, busy. She has things to do. There's hospitality to be done.

There's people that need served. And there's people to love. And I have to do these things. And Mary is sitting at the feet of the Lord. And she's apparently not doing anything except for listening.

Dinner needs fixed. And her sister is all out of sorts. And people need served. And Martha is overworked. And Mary is just sitting there.

And yet Jesus said, Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. But only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better.

And it will not be taken away from her. Brothers and sisters, are you substituting busyness? Even Christian busyness.

[22:17] For sitting with Jesus. For just sitting. And apparently doing nothing except listening and talking to him. See, our culture tells us that production is the most important thing.

We want to be efficient. We want to see visible results. And yet Mary chose what was better. So ask yourself, do I need to just stop it? Do I need to just stop some of the busyness that I am doing?

Because I'm not doing the one thing that is needful. So all your Martha-like busyness, it's killing you. And it's probably not doing a lot of people a lot of good.

You're just doing it in your own strength. And you're going and going and going. And it looks like you're doing great things. But it's hollow. It's empty.

And so Jesus invites you to come again. And to just sit down. And be with him in the quiet place. It's a sweet place to be.

[23:24] Talking about first steps. Number two. Use the time you already have. You already have lots of little moments that you can take advantage of.

Turn the radio off in the car. Turn the radio off in your truck. Take advantage of the time you have. The space that you have.

And give yourself space for intimacy to develop. So when you're walking around your workplace. I don't know if your job's like that.

But you might have this long walk. Take that time. When you college students are walking around campus. Use that time. Redeem the moments.

And leave the world, so to speak. And go inside yourself. And meet God. And enjoy just being with him. And praying with him. In the secret place that is in our hearts.

[24:21] Well, if you start doing that. You're going to want more. Because the psalmist was not kidding when he said, Taste and see that the Lord is good. And when we have tasted, we're going to want more.

And so, number three. Make a plan. And this is going to sound maybe a little outrageous. But just go with me for a second.

Make a plan to take a whole day to have no interruptions. To be alone with God. A whole day. No interruptions. No children.

No husband. No wife. No. Nothing to do. Except to be alone with God. It's going to take some planning. Isn't it? You're going to have to probably call a babysitter. You're going to have to talk to your spouse.

You're going to have to book a room at a hotel. Or something. You're going to have to make a plan. But you know what? You can do it because you make plans all the time. You plan for vacations.

[25:17] And you plan for trips. And you plan for day outings. And so you can do it. So do it for this. See, Jesus.

Jesus needed those hours. And he scheduled his life with hours of quiet. With days where there was nothing to do. Except to be with God. And if the master goes that way.

Shouldn't the servant be following? The servant is not above his master. If Jesus needed those times in his life. Surely you do too. So I have one more point.

And this is it. We've talked about Jesus needed solitude. Why Jesus needed solitude. Why we need solitude. What are some first steps to enjoying more solitude. And this is the fourth one.

Enjoy it. Enjoy it. It's a feast. And what do you do at a feast? You enjoy it. So we live in a fast food drive-thru kind of culture.

[26:23] You know, we're always going when we pull into the drive-thru. And we get our food. And it just tastes bland as can be. But it's something to eat. And so the problem is we too often live fast food drive-thru spiritual lives.

And so, you know, fast food works in a pinch, doesn't it? If you need something to eat, it's a great, great thing. But a steady diet of fast food drive-thru food will kill you.

Won't it? And fast food spirituality will kill you too. It's going to do in a pinch. Won't it? If all you have is 15 minutes and you have a hurried quiet time and you're out the door, well, it's better than

nothing.

But that isn't the way to feel close to God, is it? It's not the way to remain in Him so that we would bear much fruit.

For those things, you don't need a drive-thru. You need a feast. You need to sit down and enjoy a long, luxurious meal with God.

[27 : 31] So where there's no agenda, where there's no five chapters I have to read to keep up with my reading program, where there's not this long prayer list that I'm checking off, where there's none of that, those things have their place.

I'm not saying that. But a feast is for friendship, isn't it? A feast is for sitting with no agenda and talking and enjoying.

And that's what silence and solitude is. It's sitting down alone with God to enjoy Him, to enjoy His company. And if you do that, you will taste and see that the Lord is good.

And you will have chosen the better thing. And everyone might think you're crazy, but you'll be developing this intimacy in your heart with God.

If you're lost here, what can I say to you? Except there's no other way to the Father except through Jesus Christ.

[28 : 39] And you are in a desert of your own making. You've wandered away, and yet God is calling you. He's calling you to be with Him.

And you go and you be with Him by receiving His Son, by receiving Jesus. You've wandered away, and yet God is still calling you home.

He's still calling you to the place where you belong and where you can have fellowship and you can be strengthened. And so will you come home? Will you come home to be with the Father and to the feast?

See, Jesus is still standing with His arms wide open. And He's saying, all of you are weary and heavy laden.

Come to me and I will give you rest. And so come to Him and find rest. Find friendship. Find nutrition and strength and love.

[29 : 39] And sit down with the Father and enjoy Him. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank You that You sent Your Son to die in our place.

that we could sit down with You and enjoy You. That the written code that stood against us has been taken away, has been snatched out of Satan's hand, and it has been nailed to the cross.

And so we have been justified. Father, forgive us for going down into the broken cistern and drinking the muddy water when Your Son, the living water, was standing right there in front of us. Will You grant us repentance? Will You give us wisdom to know how to take things out of our lives that don't need to be there, that we need to find the quiet place put in its place?

And Father, I pray that You would give us a heart that would want to do these things. That we would see how good it is to be with the Lord.

[30 : 52] It's good to be near God. So give us the right heart to long for those things. And for those who are unbelieving, I pray that You would give them faith, open their blinded eyes, that they would turn away from this desert that is killing them, and come and sit down at the Feast of the Father.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.