

## Cultivate Depth: Solitude as a Spiritual Practice

When we speak of solitude as a spiritual practice, we are not simply talking about spending time alone. We are speaking about spending time alone WITH GOD.

Dallas Willard defines solitude as, "the creation of an open, empty space in our lives by purposefully abstaining from the interaction with other human beings, so that, freed from competing loyalties, we can be found by God."

### A. We can see this clearly in Jesus' example:

- ❖ Jesus began his ministry with 40 days of solitude in the desert (Matt 4:1-11)
- ❖ He went to desolate places to pray, in the midst of times of great busyness with healing people and speaking (Luke 5:16).
- ❖ He spent an entire night alone in prayer on a mountain before choosing his 12 disciples. (Luke 6:12).
- ❖ He withdrew for solitude after hearing of John the Baptist's death. (Matthew 14:13)
- ❖ After working late, he rose early in the morning to pray "in a desolate place." – Mark 1:35
- ❖ When the 12 disciples returned from a preaching and healing mission, he urged them to "come away by yourselves to a lonely place." (Mark 6:31)
- ❖ The night of his betrayal, we see him seek out solitude for prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46).
- ❖ And more!

## **B. Why was solitude important to Jesus?**

- ❖ Why did Jesus place a priority on times of solitude?
  - Jesus had a desire to be close to God.
  - Jesus was a busy man – he needed to set a rhythm that would allow him to intentionally slow down to be with God.

## **C. Why is solitude an important practice for us?**

- ❖ So many of us are living in a HURRY. We rush from one thing to the next, we focus on the next thing instead of living in the present moment. Busyness charms us.
- ❖ So many of us are living DISTRACTED.
  - Technology, particularly cell phones distract us.
  - Consumer Christianity keeps us on the surface of our faith.
- ❖ We all want to be IN CONTROL.
  - Spiritual formation is about practicing giving up control to God.
  - We have to trust that when we set aside time to sit alone and be with God, that our concerns can wait.

## **D. What does solitude do *in* us when we practice it?**

- ❖ God can use the time we take for solitude to give us greater clarity of thought when we are seeking wisdom about a decision we need to make.
- ❖ God can use the time we take to help prepare us for a challenge that is coming.
- ❖ God can use the time we take to give us strength in the midst of a hard time.

- ❖ God can use the time we take to grant us inner freedom to see ourselves and our lives as God sees us.
  - John Ortberg writes, “Solitude is the one place where we gain freedom from the forces of society that will otherwise relentlessly mold us.”
  - Adele Calhoun writes “When no one is there to watch, judge and interpret what we say, the Spirit often brings us face to face with hidden motives and compulsions. The world of recognition, achievement and applause disappears, and we stand squarely before God without props.”
- ❖ God can use our time in solitude to remind us of truth that our identity and love in God is GIVEN and not EARNED.

#### **E. How do we figure out a way to work this into our lives?**

- ❖ Evaluate how you spend your time.
- ❖ Find the spaces or places that would work for solitude.
- ❖ Start small – start with 10 minutes a day.

#### **F. What could you do during your time of solitude?**

- ❖ Solitude is a “container discipline” – it can be a container for prayer, for fasting, for silence, confession and other disciplines.
- ❖ As you begin though, don’t focus it on accomplishing a spiritual task. Focus your heart on just being with God and being in a position of listening.
- ❖ Distractions: if “to dos” arise in your mind, acknowledge them but don’t dwell on them, asking God to help bring them to mind when you are finished with the intentional time you have set aside, and then trust that He will!
- ❖ If you are distracted and need something to focus your mind on, read a Psalm to help focus your mind on the beauty and power of God and his desire to be in relationship with you. Psalm 37, 91, 103, 63, 121, 16 and many others are great Psalms to lead us into prayer.
  - Don’t expect great flashes of enlightenment all the time. Listen to what God might be saying to your heart, phrases that might come to mind or people who might rise to your awareness and ask God how to respond.

### **Practice for This Week:**

Set aside 10 minutes a day for at least four days in this next week. Put your phones and other distractions aside, find a quiet place, and seek to listen to God. You may choose to read a Psalm (see suggestions above) as you begin to focus your heart and mind on God. After that, sit with God in the quiet, and become aware of thoughts, people or images that might come to mind. You can also write your thoughts or a prayer down in a journal after the time is completed.