



Lent Course 2025 A Deeper Walk

Week 4 SOLITUDE (Matthew 26:36-46)

1 APRIL 2025 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Solitude is a powerful spiritual discipline that is often overlooked by many Christians. Between the busyness of life, family, church, hobbies and work, even social networking, taking time out to be by ourselves with the Lord is often one aspect of our faith we put into practice far less frequently than we should. And we've touched on this in recent weeks.

1. What Is Solitude?

While loneliness is marked by a painful sense of disconnection, solitude is the intentional choice to be alone, often for the purpose of spiritual and personal renewal. It is the absence of distractions like people, TV, computers, phones, radio, etc. Solitude can be getting away from everybody on a retreat or just locking yourself in your room for an hour in peaceful quiet. The reason solitude is a spiritual discipline is that 'alone time' can often be a more difficult task than we think.

QUESTION When was the last time you spent time in solitude with the Lord?

2. Why Do We Avoid Solitude?

The simplest and most common reason we avoid being alone with God is that solitude forces us to face everything in our lives head on. Yet, without time alone with God, the aspects of our lives that need the most work often go ignored or unseen. Others also keep us from solitude. There are all kinds of pressure to be social and to 'get out there' and experience life. We're often discouraged from spending time alone because to others we're not taking advantage of the life God gave us. However, God also wants us to spend time knowing us, too. We can be 'too busy being busy' can't we? And being 'too busy' for God is never a good thing.

3. Why Is Solitude Important?

It is when we are by ourselves we realize God is actually right there with us. Solitude allows us to grow closer to God as we begin to address things going on in our lives. We are able to see clearly, through a Godly perspective, what is important and what isn't. When we spend time in solitude, we get away from all the things that distract us from our relationship with God. Solitude brings us a peace that we just can't get when we're surrounded by others. It allows us to decompress and take the stress off our day. Yes, sometimes solitude can grow loud with the clanging of thoughts bumping around in our minds, but at least that clanging is just our thoughts and not mixed with the cacophony of noise the world brings in.

4. Silence And Solitude

You may not know how badly you needed silence and solitude until you get to know them. Without silence there is no solitude. Though silence sometimes involves the absence of speech, it always involves the act of listening.

Simply to refrain from talking, without a heart listening to God, is not silence. A day filled with noise and voices can be a day of silence, if the noises become for us the voice of God. We were made for rhythms of silence and noise, community and solitude. It is unhealthy to always have people around, as well as to rarely want them. God made us for cycles and seasons and for routines. Many times Jesus sought solitude in his daily life.

- He inaugurated his ministry by spending forty days alone in the desert (Matt 4:1-11)
- Before he chose the twelve he spent the entire night alone in the desert hills (Luke 6:12)
- When he received news of John the Baptist's death, he 'withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart' (Matt 14:13)
- After the miraculous feeding of the five thousand Jesus 'went up into the hills by himself.' (Matt 14:23)
- "He went up on the mountain by himself to pray ... alone" (Matthew 14:23).
- Following a long night of work, 'in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place' (Mark 1:35)
- When the twelve returned from a preaching and healing mission, Jesus instructed them, 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place' (Mar 6:31)
- Following the healing of a leper Jesus 'withdrew to the wilderness and prayed' (Luke 5:16)
- With the three disciples he sought out the silence of a lonely mountain as the stage for the transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9)
- As he prepared for his highest and most holy work, Jesus sought the solitude of the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-46).

QUESTION What is the difference between loneliness and solitude?

5. The Sound Of Silence

It's surprising how loud the 'sound of silence' can be. Especially when you're not used to it. So, we might get alone and be quiet to hear our own internal voice, the murmurs of our soul easily drowned out in noise and crowds. But the most important voice to hear in the silence is God's. The point of practicing silence as a spiritual discipline is not so we can hear God's audible voice, but so we can be less distracted, and better hear him speak, with even greater clarity, in his word. Getting away, quiet and alone, is no special grace on its own. But the goal is to create a context for enhancing our hearing from God in his word and responding back to him in prayer.

6. Finding Time for Solitude?

We live in a busy world where time alone is not always rewarded. So, solitude does take effort and persistence. While sometimes we think of solitude as long periods of meditation, often we have to be more creative about it. We may find a few minutes before we get out of bed in the morning, on a walk to the shops or with a dog or in a peaceful corner during the time you've set aside for God in your daily rhythm of prayer and study. We need to learn that it's okay to tell others that we just want to be alone and tell them in a way that helps them understand this isn't a slight against them, but just our way of letting our spirits breathe a little bit. There is a reason that solitude is a spiritual discipline, and we all have to work hard to be sure we are getting that 'alone time' with God.

Most talk about silence and solitude as spiritual disciplines seems to imply some kind of special retreat from normal life, but small, daily "retreats" can be vital as well.

Such a brief season, alone and quiet, for hearing God's voice in his word and responding to him in prayer, may be most fruitful in the morning when rested and alert, and the chaos of the day isn't snowballing around us yet. Some Christians have called it a "quiet time," highlighting the silence; others, "time alone with God," emphasizing the solitude. Call it what you may, these short daily stretches of engaging directly with God in the Scriptures and prayer are possible amid the chaos of modern life, and invaluable in guarding our heads and hearts in a noisy, crowded world. Ideally, 'getting away' might be something you do twice a year, or even once a quarter. It can be inside or out, totally alone (miles from any other human) or at a place of retreat. Details will vary, but I commend the general habit for your soul.

7. Getting Away

Getting away from time to time has always been a human necessity, but it's all the more pressing in modern life. Our lives are more crowded, and noisier, than they've ever been. "One of the costs of technological advancement," says Don Whitney, "is a greater temptation to avoid quietness." And so, many of us "need to realize the addiction we have to noise." Sometimes I catch myself thoughtlessly listening to music in the car. Sometimes I'll turn it off and try to consciously be mindful of God and pray. In the middle of a busy week, it's remarkable how strange, and wonderful, the silence can be. And so, the excesses and drawbacks of modern life have only increased the value of silence and solitude as spiritual disciplines. We need to get alone and be quiet more than ever before.

But merely getting away isn't enough. There is benefit to be had in just letting your soul decompress and getting out of the concrete jungle, enjoying nature, and letting your soul breathe fresh air. There's nothing distinctly Christian about that. For those of us who are in Christ, we want to come back better, not only rested, but more ready to love and sacrifice. We want to find new clarity, resolve, and initiative, or return primed to re-double our efforts, by faith, in our callings in the home, among friends, at work, and in the body of Christ. One benefit of silence is simply searching the depths of our own souls, asking what our blind spots have become in the rush of everyday life. In the busyness, is there anything important I'm neglecting or repressing? How am I doing in my various roles? What needs refocusing?

8. Steps Into Solitude

We can take advantage of the 'little solitudes' that fill our day.

- Consider the solitude of those early morning moments in bed before anyone is awake.
- Think of the early morning cup of coffee or tea before beginning the work of the day.
- There can be grief moments of rest and refreshment when we turn a corner and see a beautiful tree or flowers.
- Find new joy and meaning in the short walk from your car to the supermarket or ?
- Slip outside just before bed and taste the silent night – remember silence is not necessarily an absence of noise.
- We can find or develop a 'quiet place' designed for silence and solitude in the home. We usually find spaces for things that we consider important to our daily living.
- Find places outside the home; in the garden, in the park, even a church building.

QUESTION Of the suggested steps into solitude, which one/s would you find most helpful at this point in your life?

9. Using Solitude Effectively

When you do get such a thing on the calendar and find a place for it, here are some ideas for how to move through such a special season of silence and solitude.

- Pray for God's blessing, that he will bring to light what in life needs your fresh attention, and that his Spirit will prompt your subconscious to "speak" honestly to your soul. Don't assume the voices in your head are God's; assume they are yours. To hear God, take up the Scriptures, and to the degree that your own thoughts for yourself align with what God has revealed in his word, then take them as a gift from God and take them to heart.
- Read and meditate on the Bible, whether it's what's assigned that day in some regular reading plan you're working through in your daily respites or some special section you've selected for your time away. Trust God to meet you in his word and lead your time with his word — not just with internal promptings, but in what his providence has put before you objectively in the Bible.
- Have a computer (consider turning the Wi-Fi off!) or good ole fashioned pen and paper. After thawing out, get the voices in your head down on paper (silence and solitude provide a context for the spiritual discipline of journaling).
- Resist the urge to get detailed right away about specific to-dos back home; try to reflect on life and your callings in the big picture, at least to begin with. But as you wrap up your time away, get more specific, and bring back with you into normal life some take-aways that will help you sense, even immediately, the value of your retreat.
- Include an extended season of prayer, guided by the Scriptures, perhaps the Lord's Prayer, and continue recording thoughts as you direct your heart Godward in praise, confession, petition, and supplication.
- Consider setting a calendar reminder for a few days or a week later to reflect back on your time away and read any notes you took or journaling you got on paper.

10. Beware the Dangers

Both silence and solitude have their dangers. They are like fasting, in that we forgo a good gift from God, something for which we were designed, for some limited time, for the sake of some spiritual benefit. They are kinds of fasting, respites from normalcy, not meant to take over life. Silence and solitude are not ideal states, but rhythms of life to steady us for a fruitful return to people and noise. These disciplines are advantageous due to our weaknesses in this present age. It's doubtful we'll need any solitude in the new creation, though there may be the silence of worship. The Book of Revelation (8:1) makes heaven seem loud and crowded, in all the best ways. Solitude is a kind of companion to fellowship, a fasting from other people, to make our return to them all the better. And silence is a fasting from noise and talk, to improve our listening and speaking. But God doesn't mean for us to fast long from food, fellowship, noise, and talk. And there's nothing in Scripture that would lead us to think he would have us ever fast from his word and prayer. In fact, it is for increased engagement with God's word and prayer that is at the heart of good silence and solitude.

QUESTION What experience in solitude would you like to have 12 months from now? Would you be willing this week to plan it into your schedule in the coming year? How or where would you see this taking place?



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