

Going Deeper Through Silence and Solitude

Psalm 62

This morning we are continuing our series on seeking of God and deepening our relationship with him. We are going to look at two practices for growing deeper with God that are often part of the other practices we've looked at, and I've referred to them in a general way, but today we are going to talk about them directly, and these practices are silence and solitude.

Silence and solitude are often practiced along with meditating on God's Word, prayer, worship, and fasting, and this morning we are going to look why they are valuable and important. We can study God's word, pray, worship, and even observe a time of fasting when we're together with other people and there's tremendous value in that. But it isn't until we learn to practice regular times of silence and solitude in conjunction with these other things that we will be able to truly know him in a deep, personal, true, and vulnerable way.

It's easy to see why we need silence and solitude to go deeper with God because the same thing applies to any friendship or relationship. I'll use my relationship with Amy as an example. Our relationship began and grew as we spent time together with other people, but when it got to the point where we wanted to go deeper, we had to spend more and more time one-on-one. When we met it was in a group of about 15 new students at Crown College during New Student Days in August 1996. We were strangers up to that point but after a couple interactions in the group we went from strangers to acquaintances.

Things stayed like that throughout our freshman year, but in our sophomore year we had some classes together and ended up sitting next to each other in a Human Relations class on Monday nights. We had fun making sarcastic comments to each other about things that came up in class, so we interacted more regularly. During that same time I also remember seeing her in one of the hallways on campus before her philosophy class and I would stop and ask her about what she was learning. Because of these regular connections, we went from being acquaintances to friends.

It was in early May of our sophomore year that Crown had its Spring Banquet, and because of my friendship with Amy, I thought it would be fun to go with her, so I asked her out and she said yes. I wasn't really looking for a girlfriend and hadn't been thinking about her that way, but when I went to pick her up and she walked out of her dorm building, things quickly changed! I don't think I had ever seen her in a dress before, but when I saw her that day she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. We had a great time that night with our group of friends and I decided I really wanted to get to know her better.

So in the weeks after that we started to spend a lot of time together one-on-one, going on walks, going out for ice cream, sitting with each other on campus and talking. Because of that extra time on our own we went from being friends to entering a dating relationship. And over the next two years we did that more and more and our relationship kept growing deeper and deeper to the point where we got engaged and eventually married.

So we got to know each other a little bit when we were together with other people, but it was when we spent time one-on-one that we were able to go much deeper. And the same is true with your relationship with God. In order to experience a deeper relationship with God, you have to spend regular time alone with him. You might be able to get to know him by going to church or youth group or being part of a small group Bible study, but it isn't until you spend regular time alone with him, in silence and solitude that you will be able to experience a deep relationship with him.

This morning I want to look at what these practices are, what you can expect to experience when you practice them, and some practical ways you can incorporate them into your life.

What are silence and solitude? Silence of course can mean simply being silent - not speaking or singing, or listening to other people, or music. But for the purpose of seeking greater intimacy with God, it's a little bit different. Solitude can mean getting away to a solitary place where you can be alone, but again, for the purpose of seeking more of God, it's a little different.

To understand silence and solitude, you have to look at what you're trying to accomplish. I would say that the goal of these is to strip away whatever

external influences are distracting you from focusing on and connecting with God. We live in a very busy and noisy world with all kinds of things competing for our attention. We have all kinds of activities, demands, responsibilities, interests, all kinds of marketing, reminders, and messaging, notifications coming our way. We take all these things in through our senses and whether we want to or not we're constantly being bombarded and distracted, often to the point of system overload.

Silence and solitude is getting away from all these things in order to quiet our hearts and minds and be able to meet with and focus on God. So silence doesn't necessarily mean being silent; it means you intentionally get away from all the noise and distractions of everyday life. And solitude doesn't necessarily mean being all alone by yourself, because you're actually trying to be alone with God - you and God spending time together away from all the distractions of the world. And that's why silence and solitude go together.

When you practice silence and solitude, there are several things you are purposely getting away from. I'll mention a few.

- First, you are getting away from other people, no matter how much you love them - spouse, kids, parents, siblings, friends - there's a time to be with them, but there's also a time to be alone with God.
- You're seeking to get away from technology and media and devices that distract you. This oftentimes includes getting away from music, even Christian music. Sometimes music can help you experience deeper intimacy with Christ – I have one playlist that I think does that - but oftentimes music can actually prevent you from going deeper with God because you get stuck thinking about the song and that may or may not be what God wants for you during that time. In many cases you just need to put the music away so there's silence.
- Another thing to get away from is your phone - even if you have it on silent mode – it's such a dominant source of information, entertainment, communication, etc. in your life that your mind can't help but think about it if it's an option, so you need to get it out of your vicinity.
- Silence and solitude also means getting away from things that remind you of other things you need or want to do. If you go to your living room to meet with God but can see the dirty dishes in the kitchen or the grass

that needs to be mowed out the window, and you can't stop thinking of those things, you've got to go somewhere else. Sometimes going outside can help, sometimes it doesn't. If it's full of distractions or reminders of things you want or need to do, you'll have to go somewhere else.

Silence and solitude is getting away from the noise and distractions of life in order to quiet your soul and meet with God. There are several examples in Scripture. David wrote many Psalms in which he talked about getting away and quieting his soul to meet with God. Psalm 62 and 63 are two of the best. Like many Psalms, David writes about how his enemies were rising up against him, and his response was to meet the Lord in silence.

He begins Psalm 62 like this:

*For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.*

²*He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.*

Later on, in verses 5-8, he has a similar message:

⁵*For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,
for my hope is from him.*

⁶*He only is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.*

⁷*On God rests my salvation and my glory;
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.*

⁸*Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. Selah*

In the very next Psalm, Psalm 63 – which we looked at on the first week of this series – David writes about his practice of solitude in which he got alone to meet with God. In verses 5-8 we read:

⁵*My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,*

⁶*when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;*

⁷*for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.*
⁸*My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.*

Silence and solitude was a valuable part of David's relationship with God that brought him much peace, hope, security, and satisfaction.

Jesus of course gives us the perfect example of practicing silence and solitude. Throughout the gospels you read about how he would often withdraw to desolate places to get away from the crowds and all the noise, even his disciples, and commune with his heavenly Father. The question is often asked: If Jesus needed and sought time in silence and solitude in his life and ministry, how much more do we?

In a day and age of internet, smartphones, and constant communication, silence and solitude are not easy. They require planning and intentionality and trial and error, but we need them now more than ever in order to experience a deepening relationship with God.

Now that we have an idea of what they are, let's talk about why they are important. What are the benefits of taking the time and effort to get away and spend time alone with God? I read all kinds of different examples, but the ones I share are from things I've experienced in my own life. Some of these benefits are actually kind of troubling at first because we're so addicted to busyness and noise – it can actually be disorienting and disturbing to experience silence and solitude. But that's not because there's something wrong with them; it's because there's something wrong with the way we've been living.

So the first benefit I want to mention is the ability to see how distracted you really are, and that can be troubling. When you get away for a time of silence and solitude, your setting might be quiet and private, but your mind and spirit might be filled with noise. This has been a major struggle for me and obstacle to overcome in my relationship with God. It's very difficult to go from an overly busy life filled with thinking, planning, and activity and be able to experience a calm, quiet spirit in the presence of God. It's hard to tune out the internal

noise. One of the benefits of silence and solitude is becoming aware of what's actually going on. It's like a barometer for your heart, soul, and mind. When you're busy with life, you don't know how busy, distracted, and anxious you really are. But when you enter into silence and solitude (or try to) it becomes very clear.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself. Spending time in silence and solitude will help you see how you're doing in that. If you realize your heart, soul, and mind are occupied more with things other than God, you're then able to make some necessary changes.

And that's a second benefit to silence and solitude. It gives you the opportunity for confession, repentance, and to begin to make changes. It helps you to see where your priorities are screwed up and when you're valuing the things of this world more than your relationship with God and his purpose for your life. This can be very disorienting at first because your identity and purpose gets so wrapped up in the things you've been doing. But once you surrender that to God and begin to walk in his identity and purpose, it opens the door to many more spiritual blessings.

When you realize what's going on and begin to make changes, you find that the mental noise begins to diminish and you are able to connect with God, and that's a third benefit to regular times of silence and solitude. The words of Scripture come alive to you and God speaks to you through his Word. You are able to abide in Christ, to rest in your relationship with him, to experience his presence, his love for you, his desires for your life. You experience healing, forgiveness, and rest. You are able to communicate more openly with him and experience peace, trust, confidence, and joy. You are able to rejuvenate your soul and refresh your spirit as he ministers to you. It's in those times of silence and solitude that your feet land on solid ground and you have clarity of who you are and what God's calling, purpose, and will is for your life. Your priorities, values, and direction align more with his. You conform into the image of His Son.

Now, what are some practical ways you can incorporate silence and solitude into your life? I think the most important practice for you to make is what we've talked about in earlier weeks – to have a regular, consistent quiet time with God. Silence and solitude doesn't need to be separate from the other practices, in fact I think it is most beneficial when it is combined with them – meditating on God's Word, prayer, and worship. The point is that when you're doing these things, you're doing them in silence and solitude – away from distractions, just you and God. So it's important to find the right space and time to meet with God. Is there a room in your house that is free from distractions? If not, can you create one? Is there a time where that room is not filled with activity from other people? You may need to get up earlier for that to happen. Make it a priority to spend 30-60 minutes every day alone with God so you can begin to experience the benefits I mentioned earlier.

Another practice I encourage you to make is more of a lifestyle change. In our day and age it seems that we've become addicted to noise. I don't know why that is – perhaps to drown out the yearning in our souls. But God has given you that yearning for a reason and we need to learn to not drown it out. I've noticed that our tendency is to start out day and continue throughout – all the way until we go to sleep – by interacting with our phones or some other kind of screen. In most cases, a screen is going to prevent you and distract you from connecting with God. We are going to have to live differently than the rest of the world.

Set aside times when you intentionally put your phone away or don't pick it up. Don't bring it to your daily quiet time. That's obvious. But I believe it needs to extend beyond that. I have been working on trying to sit in silence more throughout my day – to have times where I have nothing to do and I intentionally don't go on my phone. I try to resist the temptation to go on Facebook or YouTube. We've become addicted to reels and social media and we don't even know it. Be aware of the people around you or God's creation. Learn to exist without a constant dependence on your phone.

I've also noticed that the tendency for many is to always be listening to music or podcasts or some other kind of audio feed. These things can be good and informational and entertaining. They can also help you grow in your relationship with God. The problem is when you're constantly listening to

them and never giving your ears, your mind, or your heart time to just be quiet. I encourage you to not get into the default habit of constantly listening to something. Try driving your car in silence. Let your default be to be unplugged from the noise and then when you listen, do it intentionally.

So these are more lifestyle changes to try to incorporate more silence back into our lives. The third practice I want to encourage is taking some extra time on an occasion, maybe once a month, where you set aside several hours, maybe half a day or even a full day for some, to spend time in silence and solitude in order to connect with God. Have you ever taken a personal spiritual retreat? Many have not, but it's a good practice to get into. You're simply giving more time to experience the benefits I've mentioned in a deeper way. Go somewhere different than normal – go to a park or the library or a remote hiking trail or retreat center. Set aside that time to seek the Lord and enjoy him and rejuvenate your soul.

When it comes to seeking the Lord and growing deeper in your relationship with him, there's no substitute for silence and solitude. You have to make it a regular practice or you won't go deep. But when you do, you will experience the nourishment that your soul longs for and you will find yourself much more in alignment with God's will and purposes in your life.