

TREK 101

Christian

Discipleship

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

By Donald S. Whitney

Lesson 9 Silence and Solitude

**“Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.” Philippians 2:12b
(NLT)**

A Ministry of Rockpointe Church

Lesson 9

SILENCE/SOLITUDE

SILENCE/SOLITUDE

(This Lesson Adapted from Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life*)

1. "Our Western culture conditions us to be comfortable with noise, hurry and crowds. We have become a people with an aversion to quiet and an uneasiness with being alone."
 - a. Agree? Disagree? Why?
 - b. What positive influence (s) does these (noise, hurry, crowds) have on our enjoyment of life?
 - c. What negative influence (s) does these have on our enjoyment of life?

READ ALOUD: ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" Psalm 46:10 (ESV)

1. How does silence and solitude, as encouraged in this verse, help us to know God better?
2. Why are we drawn to noise and hurriedness and away from silence and solitude?

A. SILENCE AND SOLITUDE DEFINED

NOTE: These two disciplines will be discussed together due to their similarities of practice and purpose.

1. What is silence?
 - i. Voluntary and temporary abstaining from speaking so seek a spiritual goal such as read, write, pray, to seek God, etc.
 - ii. No outward speaking but inward speaking to self and to God
 - iii. Amount of time varies depending on goal
 - iv. Total silence is rare; usually it is just quieter – less noise
 1. "We find complete silence shocking because it leaves the impression that nothing is happening." Dallas Willard
 2. What is your response to Willard's statement?
2. What is solitude?
 - i. Voluntary and temporary withdrawal to privacy for spiritual purpose.
 - ii. Length of time may be a few minutes to days
 - iii. More state of mind and heart than a place

- iv. Seek solitude not in order to be away from people but in order to hear God (Richard Foster calls it “Divine Whisper”) better. (1 Kings 19:11-13)
- 3. Solitude is inner fulfillment. Loneliness is inner emptiness.

B. WHY PRACTICE SILENCE AND SOLITUDE?

1. Follow Jesus’ example. Consider the circumstances Jesus sought silence and solitude. They give us some keys to when we need to as well.
 - i. Beginning of His ministry. Matthew 4:1-11
 - ii. Before choosing his 12 disciples. Luke 6:12
 - iii. Upon hearing of the death of John the Baptist. Matthew 14:13
 - iv. After feeding the 5000. Matthew 14:23
 - v. After a hard night of work. Mark 1:32-35
 - vi. After extensive ministry. Luke 5:15-16
 - vii. As He prepared for His work on the Cross. Mathew 26:36-46
2. To hear the voice of God
 - i. Biblical examples
 1. Elijah. 1 Kings 19:11-13
 2. Habakkuk. Habakkuk 2: 1ff
 - ii. Not absolutely necessary to be away from noise to hear God but there are times to eliminate the sounds of the world in order to hear God’s undistracted voice
 - iii. “I believe the convenience of sound has contributed to the spiritual shallowness of contemporary western Christianity.” Donald Whitney
 1. Agree? Disagree? Why?
 2. What is the difference between listening to music, etc while cooking or paying the bills and habitually turning on sound (TV/radio) immediately upon entering a room?
 - iv. Can people have an addiction to noise? If so, what are some negative implications for our spiritual walk?
3. To Express Worship to God
 - i. **Read aloud** Zephaniah 1:7 Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; Zephaniah 1:7a (ESV) (review context of v 1-6
 - ii. There are times to speak to God and times simply in silence to behold and adore Him.
 - iii. Worshipping God in silence may occur because your heart is so full that words cannot express your love for Him.
4. To express Faith in God
 - i. **Read aloud** Psalm 62: 1-2, ¹ 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.

- ii. **Read aloud** Psalm 62:5-6 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.
 - iii. In the silence and solitude of our hearts, we become overwhelmed as the verses show us how wonderfully dependent we are upon God
5. To be physically and spiritually restored
- i. **Read aloud** Mark 6:31 (ESV) And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. (Context in Luke 9 is when the disciples returned from their preaching mission and wanted to tell Jesus about it)
 - ii. We all need times to unstring the bow of our routine stresses and enjoy restoration that only silence and solitude can give.
6. To regain a spiritual perspective
- i. Read about Zechariah, father of John the Baptist.
 - 1. Why was Zechariah silenced? Luke 1:18-23
 - 2. What impact did this silence have on Zechariah? Luke 1:57-64
 - ii. When have you used silence and solitude to step back and get a more balanced look at life?
7. To seek the Will of God
- i. Jesus did this. Luke 6:12-13
 - ii. There are times that God makes His will to us known only in private through silence and solitude.
 - iii. Describe such an experience in your life.

C. HOW TO PRACTICE SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

1. Slow Down
- i. In his book “Good and Beautiful God”, James Bryan Smith says, “the number one spiritual sickness of our day is “hurry sickness””.
 - 1. What is your response to that statement?
 - 2. How does our culture reward busyness and overextension?
 - 3. What are some results/symptoms of “hurry sickness”?
 - ii. Practicing Slowing Down
 - 1. Instead of leaving at the last minute for an appointment/activity, leave early, drive more slowly, walk more slowly and use the extra time at the destination to notice people, creation and breathe.
 - 2. While driving, intentionally get in the slowest lane.
 - 3. Be a sloth for an hour or so. Move slowly. Take a few steps, stop, and look around. Deliberately do everything slower.

4. Have a “slow day”. Linger over breakfast. Cut out TV/phones/internet. Take a leisurely walk, watch a sunrise or sunset. Think about the difference this day has made.
- iii. To meet with God, we need to slow down inwardly so that we can relax and open our spiritual eyes and ears. Having done that, we can open the Scriptures and feed our souls on God’s Word.

2. Create Margins in your life

- i. Imagine opening a book to read and there were no margins at the top, bottom or sides. Every space on the page was filled with words. How would you react?
- ii. This is a visual picture of many people’s life: we have added so much to our schedule that we have no “margin”, no space for God, family, rest, health or leisure.
- iii. What do you see the impact in your life or in others of no margins?
- iv. Ways to create margins:
 1. Just say **NO!**
 - a. Say no to anything that is not absolutely necessary to the well-being of your soul or the welfare of others.
 - b. The choice is not between good versus evil but good versus good.
 2. Cut out unnecessary entertainment activities
 3. Explore scaling back on your commitments at work, church, and community.
 4. Get up a few minutes earlier (go to bed earlier so can get up earlier)
 5. If you do something often (visiting a friend, internet surfing, watching TV, texting) consider reducing the frequency/time without completely eliminating.

3. Ideas for silence and solitude

- i. Slow down –see above section
- ii. Create margins – see above section
- iii. Take “minute retreats”
 1. A moment at a traffic light, when on “hold” for a call, in a drive thru line
 2. During these times, concentrate on Jesus, meditate on a verse you are memorizing, reflect on a Scripture from your quiet time, whisper Jesus’ name.
 3. Simply be aware of the conscious presence of Jesus
- iv. Establish a goal for daily silence and solitude
 1. Develop within your daily private worship
 2. When have a daily time of silence and solitude then can enjoy the “minute retreats” and extended times
- v. Have an extended get away for silence and solitude
 1. Perhaps an evening, half day or longer

2. Take nothing but your bible and notebook, read, write and listen
3. Where? Empty room at church, corner of library, retreat center for all day or overnigher
- vi. Trade off daily responsibilities
 1. Trade with spouse or friend in order to have the freedom for an extended time of silence and solitude

D. BENEFITS OF PRACTICING THE DISCIPLINES OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

1. We can control the tongue from saying what we should not say.
 - i. Discuss the following about the power of words and lack of control that usually reflects UN-Christlikeness
 1. **Read aloud** James 1:26 (ESV): ²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.
 2. **Read aloud** Proverbs 18:21 (NIV84) The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.
 3. **Read aloud** Proverbs 21:23 (ESV) Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.
 4. Think of a time (s) that your lack of control of words resulted in undesirable consequences.
 - ii. Reasons that we can't remain silent include
 1. Silence often makes us feel helpless so we speak. Consider Peter in Mark 9:5-6.
 2. Think we must justify ourselves and straighten out people's "misunderstanding"
 3. Use our words to control a person or situation
 - iii. How does silence and solitude help control what should not say?
 1. When practice silence and solitude you find that you don't need to say many things you think you need to
 2. Practicing silence increases dependence upon God's control in situations where otherwise we feel compelled to speak
 3. Practicing silence and solitude heightens the skills of observation and listening resulting in more depth to words when spoken and giving greater attention to the person by truly listening to what they say
 - a. **Read aloud:** James 1:19 (ESV) Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;
 - i. What results have you observed when the tongue moves more rapidly in speaking than the ears in hearing?

- ii. Who do you know that might be described this way: he/she is quiet but when they speak everyone listens?
 - b. “When people are rude and unkind, they are screaming to the world, “I’m in pain!” Hurt people always hurt people.” Rick Warren
 - i. What is our usual response when someone speaks harsh and unkindly toward us?
 - 4. Practicing silence over time gives us control over what we say so that our tongue does not “go off” automatically.
2. We can control the tongue to say what we need to say when we need to say it.
 - i. **Read aloud** James 3:3–5 (ESV) If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. ⁴ Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!
 - 1. What do the bit and rudder examples suggest about the use of the tongue to speak when we need to?
 - ii. “If we are silent when we should speak, we are not living the discipline of silence. If we speak when we should be silent, we again miss the mark.” Richard Foster
 - 1. We can control the tongue to not say what we should not and control the tongue to speak when we should. Which is the most difficult to do?
3. Facilitates the exercise of other Disciplines
 - i. How does silence and solitude influence
 - 1. Private worship?
 - 2. Fasting?
 - 3. Meditation? (see Lesson 2 on meditation)
 - 4. Prayer?
 - ii. In generations past the primary sounds people heard was those of nature and human voices. Today’s technological advancement has produced a plethora of sounds to increase the temptation to avoid quietness, silence and solitude.
 - 1. What are the advantages of these advances?
 - 2. What are the disadvantages of these advances?

E. AXIOMS OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

- 1. Practicing the disciplines of silence and solitude leads to Christlikeness because it helps develop control of the tongue.

2. Practicing the disciplines of silence and solitude increases our understanding and awareness of God.
3. Practicing the disciplines of silence and solitude increases our understanding and awareness of ourselves.

*The more we reflect about our own lives and our deepest need for God's sovereign touch, the more we will depend on God for everything; In a God-dependent state, we will be ready for God to use us more for His purposes and glory. Thus, your silence, your meditation, and your prayer life fixed on God's presence actually equips you for greater and more powerful ministry (Jn. 14:12-14).

WILL YOU SEEK DAILY TIMES OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE?
WILL YOU SEEK EXTENDED TIMES OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE?
WILL YOU START **NOW?**