



# THE DISCIPLINE OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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## Introduction

The channels via which a Christian's spirituality is formed are their spiritual disciplines. To cultivate spiritually, deliberate efforts must be made to practice spiritual disciplines. Silence and solitude are two of the many spiritual disciplines. Even though they are two separate disciplines, researchers always consider them together because solitude is impossible without silence. The world has developed into an age that lacks discipline. We require the unflappable toughness of Christian character, which can only come from discipline.<sup>1</sup> Practical discipleship requires the use of spiritual disciplines. They assist us in knowing God and introducing God to others. To become godly, one must engage in spiritual disciplines, which are practical exercises.<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit can dwell on our souls as a result of spiritual disciplines, and when we cooperate with the Triune God, we experience spiritual transformation.<sup>3</sup> This essay examines the value of isolation and silence to see how these practices aid in a person's spiritual development.

## 1. Meaning and Definitions of Silence and Solitude

"The discipline of solitude is a key discipline for all who seek after God."<sup>4</sup> According to Julia Bathon, the practice of solitude involves going into a quiet and calm environment, like a retreat center so that you are not carried away with your daily activities, where you can have an uninterrupted and distraction-free environment where you are alone with God and yourself.<sup>5</sup> Clark Gilpin also says that solitude is a selective departure from the everyday converse of social life. But he uses the term saying, this departure is selective. He explains it as,

Such a departure may be thought of as a set aside that leaves a space to be filled by something else, as the beginning of a journey that embarks toward a destination, as a detachment that prizes independence, as seclusion that waits alone for the

<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Whitney and J. I. Packer, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, Colo: NavPress, 1997), 221–248.

<sup>2</sup> George White, "12 Spiritual Disciplines of Abstinence" (n.d.): 1, accessed August 20, 2017, [http://www.tjcnava.com/uploads/3/2/6/9/3269493/12\\_spiritual\\_disciplines\\_of\\_abstinence.pdf](http://www.tjcnava.com/uploads/3/2/6/9/3269493/12_spiritual_disciplines_of_abstinence.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2015), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Haley Barton and Leighton Ford, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2008), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Julia Bathon, "Solitude Renews Life" (n.d.): 1, accessed August 20, 2017, [http://www.citwretreat.com/pdfFiles/reflections/Solitude\\_Renews\\_Life\\_by\\_Julia\\_Bathon.pdf](http://www.citwretreat.com/pdfFiles/reflections/Solitude_Renews_Life_by_Julia_Bathon.pdf).

companion, as a flight from danger, as a purification that purges some deeply residing ill, as renunciation that turns its back on former attractions.<sup>6</sup>

According to Whitney, “Silence is completely quiet for spiritual purposes. Solitude is complete aloneness for spiritual purposes.”<sup>7</sup> But at the same time, Carson says that it demands us to balance the fact that it is neither right nor desirable to be isolated from our God-given responsibilities. Thus he defines both the disciplines as,

The discipline of silence is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought. Solitude is the spiritual discipline of voluntary and temporarily withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes. Both silence and solitude may be sought to participate without interruption in other Spiritual Disciplines, or just to be alone with God.<sup>8</sup>

Robert L. Plummer says that Christian believers from all over have found the practice of silence and solitude a transforming spiritual experience. Though solitude and silence are practiced by misguided legalistic ascetics, spiritual silence and solitude are not just the activities of misguided legalistic ascetics. He also refers to the famous Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon who in his Lectures to his Students writes,

Time spent in quiet prostration of the soul before the Lord is most invigorating. . . . Quietude, which some men cannot abide, because it reveals their inner poverty, is as a palace of cedar to the wise, for along its hallowed courts the King in his beauty designs to walk. . . . Priceless as the gift of utterance may be, the practice of silence in some aspects far excels it. Do you think me a Quaker? Well, be it so. Herein I follow George Fox most lovingly; for I am persuaded that most of us think too much of speech, which after all is but the shell of thought. Quiet contemplation, still worships, unuttered rapture, these are mine when my best jewels are before me. Brethren rob not your heart of the deep sea joys; miss not the far-down life, by forever babbling among the broken shells and foaming surges of the shore.<sup>9</sup>

Donald S Whitney explains the purpose of silence and solitude in detail. According to him, silence and solitude as complementary disciplines to fellowship. Without silence and solitude, we are shallow. Without fellowship we are stagnant. Balance requires them all. The present culture allows us to be comfortable with noise and crowds, not with silence and solitude. Whitney refers to the statement of Jean Fleming in her book,

We live in a noisy, busy world. Silence and solitude are not twentieth-century words. They fit the era of Victorian lace, high-button shoes, and kerosene lamps better than our age of television, video arcades, and joggers wired with earphones. We have become a people with an aversion to quiet and an uneasiness with being alone.<sup>10</sup>

Silence helps us to be gowning in self-awareness and invites our subconscious to move into a deeper level of knowing and having an intimate relationship with God. In silence, we develop an increased skill of listening to God.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> W Clark Gilpin, “‘Inward, Sweet Delight in God’: Solitude in the Career of Jonathan Edwards,” *The Journal of Religion* 82, no. 4 (October 2002): 525.

<sup>7</sup> Whitney and Packer, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 176.

<sup>8</sup> Donald A Carson, “Spiritual Disciplines,” *Themelios* 36, no. 3 (November 2011): 12, accessed June 5, 2017, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAI8W160523000191&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>9</sup> Robert L Plummer, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines of ‘Silence and Solitude’ Really Biblical?” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 102, accessed June 5, 2017,

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001789355&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>10</sup> Whitney and Packer, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 176.

<sup>11</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 107.

## 2. The State of Silence and Solitude

### 2.1. Silence and Solitude is different from Eastern Religious Meditation

Spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude are extremely different from the eastern religious understanding of meditation. Dirk Nelson expresses his thought saying that silence as a spiritual discipline is unique and opposed to Hindu or Buddhist understanding of meditation. Eastern religious meditation is a detachment, absorption, and release from suffering. The ascetics reject the physical as an illusion. Emotions are suspended or eliminated and the individuals are expected to be transcended into a pool of consciousness. Whereas, biblical silence or a time of meditation is a time of encountering God. The Physical and Spiritual are realities, where emotions are required and the individual or personality is essential.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.2. Silence and Solitude is Not Loneliness

May Sarton says, “Loneliness is the poverty of self: Solitude is the richness of self.” Loneliness is painful and a lack of being in a relationship. Solitude is the state of being comfortable with oneself and using this time of being alone as a time to grow.<sup>13</sup> Richard Foster says, “loneliness is an inner emptiness whereas solitude is inner fulfillment.”<sup>14</sup>

Solitude is a condition of peace that stands in direct opposition to loneliness. Loneliness is like sitting in an empty room and being aware of the space around you. It is a condition of separateness. Solitude is becoming one with the space around you. It is a condition of union. Loneliness is small, solitude is large. Loneliness closes in around you; solitude expands toward the infinite. Loneliness has its roots in words, in an internal conversation that nobody answers; solitude has its roots in the great silence of eternity.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3. Silence and Solitude - Not Monastery life

When we think about silence and solitude, what often comes to mind is monks living in a monastery, who have taken a vow of silence. Practicing the disciplines of silence and solitude helps us to pursue the same worthy goal as the ancient monks, but without permanently renouncing life in this world or mandating extra-biblical practices. Most of us are so busy and distracted by all the noise and activity around us that we are unable to focus on the things of the Lord. Whitney quotes Richard Foster who said, We can hardly stand quiet it makes us feel so helpless. We are so used to managing and controlling others with words. The disciplines of isolation and silence support us in our fight for spiritual mindedness. It might be best to approach silence and solitude as intentional channels for channeling spiritual mindedness, lest we find ourselves simply enjoying a little peace.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Dirk Nelson, “Lectio Divina: A ‘New’ Phenomenon from Early Christianity,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (May 2002): 41, accessed August 29, 2017, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001504994&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>13</sup> Julia Bathon, “Microsoft Word - Solitude Renews Life - Solitude\_Renews\_Life\_by\_Julia\_Bathon.Pdf,” n.d., 2, accessed August 29, 2017, [http://www.citwretreat.com/pdfFiles/reflections/Solitude\\_Renews\\_Life\\_by\\_Julia\\_Bathon.pdf](http://www.citwretreat.com/pdfFiles/reflections/Solitude_Renews_Life_by_Julia_Bathon.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Foster and Katherine Yanni, *Celebrating the Disciplines: How to Put the Bestselling Book CELEBRATION OF DISCIPLINE into Practice* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2013), 46.

<sup>15</sup> “Microsoft Word - Solitude Renews Life - Solitude\_Renews\_Life\_by\_Julia\_Bathon.Pdf,” 2.

<sup>16</sup> Whitney and Packer, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 2.

### 3. Reasons for Silence and Solitude

#### 3.1 To Follow Jesus

The Scriptures teach that Jesus practiced silence and solitude. Matthew 4:1, The Holy Spirit led Jesus into this long period of fasting and solitude. In Luke's account of this experience, it's interesting to observe that he says Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1) when He was led into this particular Discipline, but that afterward He returned to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). In Matthew 14:23, "And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone." He sent both the seeking multitudes and His disciples away so He could be alone with the Father.<sup>17</sup>

In Mark 1:35, "And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there." The previous verses tell us that after dark, "the whole city" gathered at the door of the house where Jesus was staying. There He healed many people and cast out demons. But before it was daylight again, He went to spend time alone. Jesus knew that had He waited until the morning hours He could never have had time for silence and solitude. In Luke 4:42, "And when the day came, He departed and went to a lonely place; and the multitudes were searching for Him, and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from going away from them." Put yourself in Jesus' sandals for a moment. Whitney says, Jesus did not yield to those temptations of being carried away or making them more important than the priority of disciplining Himself to be alone. So, to be like Jesus we must discipline ourselves to find times of silence and solitude. The reason we must do this is to find spiritual strength through these Disciplines as Jesus did.<sup>18</sup>

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. Most likely, we need to get alone and be quiet more than ever before.<sup>19</sup>

#### 3.2 To Listen to the Voice of God

It can be difficult to recognize the voice of God in a busy life and noisy surroundings. We might need to get alone and be quiet to hear our internal voice, the murmurs of our soul that are easily drowned out in noise and crowds. But the most important voice to hear in the silence is God's. Mathis in *Habits of Grace* says,

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 to him in prayer. Silence and solitude, then, are not direct means of grace in themselves, but they can grease the skids—like caffeine, sleep, exercise, and singing—for more direct encounters with God in his word and prayer.<sup>20</sup>

Calhoun in the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* refers to Susan Muto's saying,

In a noise-polluted world, it is even difficult to hear ourselves think let alone try to be still and know God. Yet it seems essential for our spiritual life to seek some silence, no matter how busy we may be. Silence is not to be shunned as an empty space but to be befriended as fertile ground for intimacy with God.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 139–142.137.

<sup>20</sup> Mathis and Piper, *Habits of Grace*, 137.

<sup>21</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 107.



A few biblical examples of hearing the voice of God better in silence are Elijah going to Mt. Horeb where he heard the gentle whisper of God's voice (1 Kings 19:11-13); Habakkuk standing on the guard post and keeping watch to see what God would say to him (Habakkuk 2:1); and Paul going away to Arabia after his conversion so he could be alone with God (Galatians 1:17). Of course it is not always necessary to get far away from noises and people to hear God speak, otherwise we would never perceive His promptings in the course of everyday life, or even in peopled worship services. But there are times when it is necessary to eliminate the voices of the world to hear undistracted, the voice of God.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3 An Act of Worship

There is a time to speak to God and there is a time simply to behold and adore Him in silence. Whitney refers to the journals of George Whitefield as “God was pleased to pour into my soul a great spirit of supplication, and a sense of His free, distinguishing mercies so filled me with love, humility, and joy and holy confusion that I could at last only pour out my heart before Him in awful silence. I was so full that I could not well speak.”<sup>23</sup> Worshiping God in silence may occur when the heart is so full that words cannot express your love for Him. At other times, it can be just the opposite, so passionless that any words seem hypocritical.

The worship of God does not always require words, sounds, or actions. Sometimes worship consists of a God-focused stillness and hush. Scriptural precedent for this includes texts like Habakkuk 2:20: "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him," Zephaniah 1:7: "Be silent before the Lord God!", and Zechariah 2:13, "Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord." It's not just a silence that's enjoined, but a silence "before Him," "before the Lord God!", "before the Lord." That's the silence of worship.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of the state of emotions or feelings, there is always a place for silent worship.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.4 Time to Restore and Gain New Perspectives

The time spent with God can never be wasted, rather it is more fruitful than the time spend on anything or anywhere. David G Benner has rightly said, “Any authentic spiritual journey must grow from direct, personal experience of God. There is no substitute for a genuine encounter with Perfect Love. Knowing God is not simply a matter of believing certain things about him. Personal knowing goes beyond objective knowledge.”<sup>25</sup>

Ruth Haley Barton’s understanding of solitude contributes to the above statement. She says, “Solitude and silence are not self-indulgent exercises for times when an overcrowded soul needs a little time to itself. Rather, they are concrete ways of opening to the presence of God beyond human efforts and beyond the human constructs that cannot fully contain the Divine.”<sup>26</sup> The practice of solitude and silence challenges us in our stage of spiritual life. They challenge us at the level of our culture. They challenge us at the level of our soul: in the silence, we become aware of inner dynamics we have been able to avoid by keeping ourselves noisy and busy. They draw us into a spiritual battle: in silence, there is the potential for each of us to “know that I am

<sup>22</sup> Whitney and Packer, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 178.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 179

<sup>24</sup> Whitney and Packer, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 179.

<sup>25</sup> David G. Benner and M. Basil Pennington, *Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*, Expanded ed. edition. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015), 31.

<sup>26</sup> Ruth Haley Barton and Dallas Willard, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence*, Expanded edition. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2010), 31.

God” with such certainty that the competing powers of evil and sin, self and ego can no longer hold us in their grip.<sup>27</sup>

Silence is not a time to come up with new strategies for fixing life. It is a time to rest in God, to lean into God, and a time to be more relished by the living water. It can form your life even if it doesn’t solve your life. This silence can restore you and give you new perspectives.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Biblical Basis for Silence and Solitude

Scriptural precedents for solitude and silence are given from both Old and New Testament texts (e.g., 1 Kgs 19; Mark 1:35). We should note that there are many different reasons for silence and solitude in the Scriptures. Robert L. Plummer gives a brief list of Scripture that includes silence and/or solitude as an expression of or in close association with:

“(a) Deference to God, especially in His role as judge and sovereign Lord

(Job 6:24; Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Rom 3:19)

(b) Avoidance of sins of speech (Prov 11:12; James 1:19)

(c) A time to focus on prayer (Matt 6:6; Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18)

(d) Physical refreshment (Mark 6:31)

(e) Grief (1 Sam 1:13)

(f) Ignorance (Matt 22:12)

(g) Trust (Ps 131:2; Isa 30:15; Lam 3:26)

(h) Punishment (Luke 1:20)

(i) Humility and creatureliness (Eccl 5:2)

(j) Recognition of life’s varied experiences (Eccl 3:7)

(k) Demonized despair (Luke 8:29)<sup>29</sup>

To understand silence and solitude, we should also learn about the scriptural understanding of communication and community as spiritual priorities. In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “One who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair.”<sup>30</sup>In critiquing the lifestyle of the Desert Fathers,

Martin Shelley queries, how can you learn to love if no one else is around? How can you learn humility living alone? How can you learn kindness or gentleness or goodness in isolation? How can you learn patience unless someone puts yours to the test? . . . As attractive as solitary sanctification may seem, it is life amid people, busyness, and interruptions that develop many of the qualities God requires.<sup>31</sup>

Recent authors encouraging silence and solitude have discussed the key characters in the biblical narrative who spend time alone in silence. Barton also explains the life of Moses as an example of a leader who had an

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 109.

<sup>29</sup> Robert L Plummer, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines of ‘Silence and Solitude’ Really Biblical?,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 4, accessed August 29, 2017, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001789355&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>30</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Life Together : The Classic Exploration of Christian Community (Paperback); 1954 Edition* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1672), 78.

<sup>31</sup> Plummer, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines of ‘Silence and Solitude’ Really Biblical?,” 109.

encounter with the Lord in silence and solitude where he gained clarity about his calling. He received the power to stay faithful through his leadership, the grace to live with imperfections and not to be completely derailed by them. At the end of his life, Moses was described as the greatest prophet in Israel, whom the Lord knew face to face.<sup>32</sup>

Ruth Haley Barton builds her recent book *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* around the well-known story of Elijah's flight from Jezebel into the wilderness (1 Kgs 19). Dallas Willard in *The Spirit of the Disciples*, claims, "John the Baptist, like many forerunners in the prophetic line, was much alone in the deserted places of his land."<sup>33</sup> The Biblical text that supports this understanding is Luke 1:80, which reads, "And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel." It shows clearly that there was a private time of preparation for a greater ministry in the life of John the Baptist in this silence and solitude.

Plummer refers to Richard Foster's writing that the apostle Paul withdrew for thirteen years from the time of his conversion until he began his ministry at Antioch. He probably spent three years in the desert and then approximately ten years in his hometown of Tarsus. During that time he no doubts experienced a lot of solitude. This was followed by a period of very intense activity as Paul carried out his mission to the Gentiles. Paul needed both solitude and activity, and so do we.<sup>34</sup> From this verse, "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned to Damascus" (Gal. 1:15-17), we understand that Paul prepared himself for mission in solitude.

Solitude was a standing habit of Jesus that his followers should emulate (Mt 14:13, 17:1, 20:17, Mk 6:30).<sup>35</sup> The "wilderness," the place of solitude and deprivation, was the place of strength and strengthening for our Lord Jesus, and that the Spirit led him there-as he would lead us there-to ensure that Christ was in the best possible place to be. In that solitude, Jesus fasted for more than a month. Then, and not before, Satan was allowed to approach him with his glittering proposals of bread, notoriety, and power. Only then was Jesus at the height of his strength. The desert was his fortress, his ... place of power. Throughout his life, he sought the solitary place as an indirect submission of his own physical body to righteousness! (e.g Mark 1:35, 3:13, 6:31, 46). That is, he sought it not as an activity done for its own sake, but as one done to give him power for good. All of those who followed Jesus knew of his practice of solitude, and it was greatly imitated in the centuries after his death.<sup>36</sup>

In Jesus' thought, the Father was very near to him. This sense of the nearness of God (Mark 8:31-35) was one of the characteristics which marked him off from his contemporaries. They prayed publicly and elaborately. He sought to silence and solitude in which to meet his Father. "He withdrew himself into the deserts and prayed." In silence and solitude, he cultivated simplicity in prayer.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Barton and Ford, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, Reprint edition. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1999), 101.

<sup>34</sup> Plummer, "Are the Spiritual Disciplines of 'Silence and Solitude' Really Biblical?," 106.

<sup>35</sup> Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 1998), 121.

<sup>36</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 101-102.

<sup>37</sup> Whitney and Packer, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 34.

There are seasons of sleeplessness and seemingly incessant activity that accompany the lives of those seeking to serve God and love his people (Mark 6:33–34; 2 Cor 11:26–28). It appears, however, that these activity-packed periods are only for seasons. Arguably, time apart in silence and solitude stores up emotional and spiritual strength for times of great trial. In Mark 9:29, Jesus states that some demons can only be driven out only after sufficient reparatory prayer. The disciples could not cast out the demon because “This kind can come out only by prayer.” Some great feats of spiritual victory require many hours of preparation.<sup>38</sup>

As Jesus prepared for the holiest work, he sought the solitude of the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26: 36-46). Seeking out for solitary place was a regular practice of Jesus, so it should be for his followers.<sup>39</sup>

## 5. Practical Steps for Silence and Solitude

There are different steps to spending time in silence and solitude. Ruth and Mathis provide a very effective and practice to spend the time in solal wayside.

- a. **Identify a sacred space.** Find out a physical space in which you can be alone regularly which can be a spot at home, outdoors, or a comfortable place basically to be quiet and in a receptive state of being. The place can be made into a setting that provides the feel of God’s presence, and the time can be communicated to the immediate people to avoid interruptions
- b. **Begin with a modest goal.** Depending on each personality and pace of life, reliance on words and activity time of spending with God can be increased gradually. The amount of time is not nearly as important as the regularity of the practice.
- c. **Settle into a comfortable yet alert position** as physical discomfort can be also distractive. Over time, different other prayer postures can be chosen but this is a good place to start.
- d. **Ask God for a simple prayer that expresses openness and desire for God.** This small prayer is a channel to enter into a time of silence and a way of dealing with distractions. Distractions are something that keeps coming but it is important to learn to overcome them.
- e. **Resist the urge to judge yourself or your experiences in silence.** The purpose of time spent in silence is just to be with God in whatever state you are in and to let him be in control. Trust that whatever your time in silence was like, it was exactly as it should be.<sup>40</sup>
- f. **Pray for God’s blessing,** that he will bring to light what needs your fresh attention in life, 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 Scripture, and to the degree that your 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.
- g. **Read and meditate on the Bible,** whether it is what is assigned that day in some regular reading plan you’re working through in your daily respites or some special section you have selected for your time away.

<sup>38</sup> Plummer, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines of ‘Silence and Solitude’ Really Biblical?” 111.

<sup>39</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path To Spiritual Growth*, 3rd edition. (HarperCollins e-books, 2009), 85.

<sup>40</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, “Beyond-Words’ An Invitation to Silence and Solitude” in *Transformational Theology: Forming the Soul* (n.d.): 11, accessed August 29, 2017, <http://dallaswillardcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Beyond-Words.Barton.5.2.pdf>.



Trust God to meet you in his word and lead your time with Scripture—not just with internal promptings, but in what his providence has put before you objectively in the Bible.

- h. Spend a few minutes just listening to the silence**, and let your soul begin to “thaw,” especially if you keep a busy schedule in a crowded place.
- i. Have a facility to write.** After thawing out, put the voices in your head down on paper.
- j. Resist the urge to get detailed right away** about specific 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 takeaways that will help you sense, even immediately, the value of your retreat.
- k. Include an extended season of prayer**, guided by the Scripture, perhaps the Lord’s Prayer, and continue recording thoughts as you direct your heart Godward in praise, confession, petition, and supplication.<sup>41</sup>
- l. Close your time in silence with a prayer of gratitude for God’s presence with you.**<sup>42</sup>
- m. Consider setting a calendar reminder** for a few days or a week after you return home to reflect on your time away and read any notes you took or journaling you got on paper.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

Thus, a genuine period of alone and stillness might take us to a new level of spiritual development. Spiritual disciplines are necessary for spiritual formation, and as the various sections of the article have addressed, the practice of quiet and isolation is a necessary discipline for spiritual renewal. Ruth Barton rightly says that “You may not know how badly you needed silence and solitude until you get to know them.”<sup>44</sup> Only solitude and stillness will enable us to hear the voice of Jesus, freeing us from our dependence on sound and noise to experience a closer relationship with God. It's crucial to prioritize time with God throughout everyday encounters. The rejuvenating time spent in God's presence in solitude and silence in connection with the Holy Spirit has the power to change lives. To be godly, one must practice spiritual discipline.

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<sup>41</sup> Mathis and Piper, *Habits of Grace*, 142.

<sup>42</sup> Barton, ““Beyond-Words" An Invitation to Silence and Solitude" in *Transformational Theology: Forming the Soul*,” 11.

<sup>43</sup> Mathis and Piper, *Habits of Grace*, 139–142.

<sup>44</sup> Barton and Willard, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 10.

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