

## “Be still and know that I am God”

Psalm 46:10

I’m going to suggest two exercises that will help you to experience God’s Presence. As you respond to the invitation by God of being transformed into the image of Christ for the sake of others. These activities have been practised by followers of Jesus for centuries.

The question you have to ask yourself is are you willing to put in the effort? Now we know that God is not some sort of vending machine that if we put some sort of payment in we will get the ‘goodies’ out, so get rid of any legalism and religion as you approach these exercises. Remember God’s grace. The way into a relationship is through grace and the way on in that relationship is through grace. It’s all grace. And as Dallas Willard is often quoted as saying “Grace is opposed to earning, not effort.”

These exercises are so counter cultural and will involve thinking about things in a very different way. Our lives are filled with NOISE. Noise has been defined as unwanted sound. It drowns out the signals we want or need to hear. Noise can block, distort, change or interfere with the meaning of a message. When you are trying to hear something important and there is background noise, you know how frustrating it is.

Is the noise of life drowning out the still small voice of God? How do we hit mute?

In this post I want to explain the first two related exercises: Solitude and Silence...

### **1. Solitude**

“(Jesus) went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.” -Matthew 14:23

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. This took place after a long day in which Jesus is busy into the night teaching and healing the sick.” -Mark 1:35

“Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” -Luke 5:15-16

Jesus intentionally sought solitude. It wasn’t just that every now and then Jesus found Himself alone. Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. He considered time alone with God important and he intentionally withdrew from people. He withdrew from the noise of the villages. He withdrew from the demands of people who wanted to hear His teaching and feel His healing touch. He withdrew from his circle of close friends He intentionally went off to be by Himself with God.

Jesus often sought solitude. It was a part of the rhythm of His life.

If you want to grow. If you want to drown out the noise of life. If you want to feel God’s presence. If you want to be de-stressed from the hassles of life. If you are willing to relinquish control. Then seek out solitude.

Solitude allows your inner compass to stop whirling in response to the demands of others.

*“Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. Solitude begins with a time and place for God, and God alone. If we really believe not only that God exists but also that God is actively present in our lives - healing, teaching and guiding - we need to set aside a time and space to give God our undivided attention.”*

*“When we pursue solitude we eliminate distractions. We often use the outer distractions to shield ourselves from the inner noise” - Henri Nouwen*

## **2. Silence**

Some of us just need to “Shut up!”.

*“Solitude is central precisely because it breaks us free of the world in which we're used to exercising power or having power exercised over us. Solitude and silence together, when adequately practiced, form a framework within which we can absolutely and constantly be aware of the movement of God in us, and know it is not us. This is why the disciplines are so essential, because they break away that competing world that we have identified with. We are often just puppets of our own egotism and that of others.” - Dallas Willard*

There is power in silence. In a culture where there is constant noise. Engaging in the discipline of silence can be hard work, but time with God in silence soothes the soul.

*“Only solitude and silence, extensively practiced at wisely allotted intervals, can take the world off my back and forever release me from both hurry and loneliness. They open the door to productive engagement with other disciplines. I begin to find myself increasingly before God in such a way that he can safely fill me with himself.” - Dallas Willard*

What noise in your life needs to be silenced?

- Outer distractions can be things like TV, radio, music, facebook, computer games, children(!).

- Inner noise also affects most of us and can be such things as doubts, anxieties, fear, bad memories, unresolved conflicts, angry feelings, and impulsive desires. The things our mind wanders to. The things we turn over in our mind again and again, playing a conversation or situation over in our minds repeatedly.

The point of your time in solitude and silence is to do nothing and don't try to make anything happen.

In solitude and silence you're learning to stop doing, stop producing, stop pleasing people, stop entertaining yourself, stop obsessing — stop doing anything, except to simply be yourself in God's presence. Watch what surfaces in your heart as you spend time alone with God. You will find that you are not truly alone. His presence will fill you, “streams of living water” will well up within you (John 7:38)

Find a place to be quiet and on your own. Start by sitting quietly for 5 minutes and invite God's presence to fill you. Get rid of any distractions, including your phone. Turn off any music. Go somewhere quiet.

Henri Nouwen explains some of what may happen if you take this seriously:

*“Solitude is not a private therapeutic place. Rather, it is the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born...”*

*In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me – naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken – nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something.*

*But that is not all. As soon as I decide to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies, and weird associations jump about in my mind like monkeys in a banana tree. Anger and greed begin to show their ugly faces. I give long, hostile speeches to my enemies and dream lustful dreams in which I am wealthy, influential, and very attractive – or poor, ugly, and in need of immediate consolation. Thus I try again to run from the dark abyss of my nothingness and restore my false self in all its vainglory... The wisdom of the desert is that the confrontation with our own frightening nothingness forces us to surrender ourselves totally and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ .”(The Way of the Heart, p. 27-28).*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer considered silence and solitude an essential part of experiencing God’s presence on a daily basis. He wrote:

*“We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God... Silence is nothing else but waiting for God’s Word and coming from God’s Word with a blessing. But everybody knows that this is something that needs to be practiced and learned” (Life Together, p. 79).*

Give it a week of 5 minutes in the morning and 5 minutes in the evening and write down what you find. Share it with a trusted friend or life group.