



MAY 17<sup>TH</sup>, 2026

## **BEHOLDING: DISCIPLINES FOR IMAGERS** **STILLNESS: THE DISCIPLINE OF ATTENTION**

### SCRIPTURE

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

**Genesis 1:1–2 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions,

**Deuteronomy 32:11 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” <sup>13</sup> And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> And he charged him to tell no one, but “go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” <sup>15</sup> But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. <sup>16</sup> But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

**Luke 5:12–16 (ESV)**

<sup>7a</sup> Rather train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup> for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

**1 Timothy 4:7a–8 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

**2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

**2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. <sup>2</sup> But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. <sup>3</sup> O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

**Psalms 131:1–3 (ESV)**

## DISCUSSION

### Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

**Icebreaker Question:** When was the last time you experienced genuine silence for more than a few minutes? How did it make you feel?

### Sermon Summary

The discipline of attention involves intentionally choosing silence, stillness, and solitude to behold God and be transformed. Just as the Spirit hovered over the "wild and waste" in creation, the Spirit hovers over the chaos of our hearts, ready to bring order and life. Jesus modeled this discipline by regularly withdrawing to desolate places to pray, especially as demands increased. The goal is not productivity but identity—becoming like a "weaned child" who is settled and satisfied simply being with God.

### Discussion Questions

#### Understanding the Discipline

1. **The Opening Exercise:** How did you experience the 2-3 minutes of silence at the beginning of the sermon? What thoughts, feelings, or anxieties surfaced for you?
2. **Noise in Our Lives:** The sermon defined "noise" as anything that keeps us from being fully present to ourselves or God. What are the primary sources of noise in your life right now? (Consider both external and internal noise)
3. **Genesis 1:2 Pattern:** The pattern is: wild/waste → Spirit hovers → God speaks → life emerges. How does this pattern help you understand what God might be doing in the chaotic or "waste" areas of your life?

#### Jesus' Example

4. **Withdrawing When Busy:** Luke 5:15-16 shows Jesus withdrawing *when the crowds grew*. Why do you think Jesus responded to increased demand by pulling away rather than ramping up? How does this challenge our cultural values?
5. **Identity Before Productivity:** The sermon emphasized that Jesus was the "Son of God" before he was the "Servant of God." How does your productivity or busyness currently define your identity? What would change if you truly believed your identity was secure in God apart from what you accomplish?

#### Personal Application

6. **For the Busy:** If you identify as busy, productive, or constantly stimulated:
  - What are you avoiding by staying busy?
  - What would be your "version of the wilderness"—a practical place/practice for paying attention to God?
  - What squirrels are you most prone to chase?
7. **For the Silent:** If you're in a season of unchosen silence (empty nest, loss, divorce, retirement):
  - How can you reframe your silence as an invitation from God rather than abandonment?
  - What would it look like to use this season for spiritual formation?

8. **The Weaned Child (Psalm 131):** What's the difference between an infant at the breast (desperate, grasping, needy) and a weaned child (settled, satisfied, simply present)? Which better describes your current relationship with God?

### Key Takeaways

- ✓ **The disciplines are gifts, not burdens** - They're how we participate in the Spirit's transforming work
- ✓ **Before God speaks, the Spirit broods** - Stillness creates space for God to work in our chaos
- ✓ **Training, not trying** - Spiritual formation requires consistent practice, not perfect performance
- ✓ **The busier life gets, the more we need prayer** - External demands require deeper interior life
- ✓ **Identity before productivity** - Who we are in God must come before what we do for God
- ✓ **Being with God is enough** - The goal is presence, not transaction

### Practical Applications

#### This Week's Challenge: Choose One

#### Option 1 - Daily Silence Practice:

- Set aside 10 minutes each day for silence and stillness
- No music, no Scripture reading, no agenda—just be present with God
- Journal briefly afterward: What did you notice? What was difficult? What surfaced?

#### Option 2 - Weekly Wilderness Retreat:

- Schedule 1-2 hours this week to withdraw to a "desolate place"
- Turn off your phone, leave it in the car
- Walk, sit, pray, pay attention to God and your own heart

#### Option 3 - Noise Audit:

- Track your screen time and "noise consumption" for three days
- Notice when you reach for your phone or turn on a podcast—what are you avoiding?
- Choose one source of noise to eliminate or reduce this week

#### Option 4 - Psalm 131 Meditation:

- Read Psalm 131 slowly each morning this week
- Ask God to show you where your heart is "lifted up" or where you're occupying yourself with things beyond your control
- Practice the prayer: "I have calmed and quieted my soul"

#### Group Accountability

- Share which option you're choosing with at least one other person
- Check in mid-week via text: How's it going?
- Come prepared next week to share what you learned

## Reflection Questions for Personal Journaling

1. What is the "wild and waste" in my life right now—the chaotic, formless, empty places?
2. Where am I confusing busyness with significance?
3. What would it look like for me to have my life and ministry flow out of identity received from God rather than identity constructed by circumstances?
4. Am I more like the desperate infant or the weaned child in my relationship with God?
5. What am I afraid I might discover about myself or my life if I truly got quiet?

## Closing Exercise (10 minutes)

### Guided Practice:

- Spend 5 minutes in silence together as a group
- Focus on the image of the Spirit hovering over your heart
- Allow the Spirit to still the waters of your soul
- Close with one person praying Psalm 131 over the group

**Quote to Remember:** *"I have so much to do today that I'll spend the first three hours in prayer."* - Martin Luther

*"If the devil can't make you bad, he'll make you busy."* - Attributed to Luther

*"The cure for your loneliness is solitude."* - Dallas Willard