

Series/Title: Devoted: Solitude for Survival

DT: **Like Christ, we all need rest and solitude so that we remain strong for those we love and are called to serve.**

INTRODUCTION:

—Tell of craziness of life/ministry in 2017: Lots of life changes: church staff changing, my theology was changing, 70 hour weeks, mentoring a struggling couple, mom's cancer returned, young family, transitioned out of youth ministry to primarily working with adults. I was exhausted and burning out and restless. I need to be still and know that God is in charge (Ps. 46:10).

—For most of us, solitude is foreign. It's uncomfortable—even when we have the opportunity to be alone, to sit in silence—we opt for a podcast, we run and listen to music, or we grab a book or our phones and fill our minds with information. Even in the bathroom, where we can find peace...we're texting (LOL)!! —When was the last time you sat, walked, ran, or hiked by yourself without music or a podcast playing? When was the last time you found a place to be alone with your phone *off* and no book found in your hand? —Just because there's no sound and you're by yourself, doesn't mean there's no noise and you're all alone. Turn off the phone, don't take a book, and be in a quiet place with *just* your thoughts and *just* your God.

—Why do we struggle so much with truly being alone and quiet? 1) FOMO—Fear of Missing Out: we live in the age of instant information and we want to be the first to know, because it's almost like there's this sense of power when you find out “earth shattering” news and are able to bring it to everyone's attention. 2) Noise and Distraction is Comforting: We've been naturalized to noise and distractions so much that we become “silently awkward” in non-social settings—silence is uncomfortable. 3) Busyness and overcommitment—no longer do we control our calendars but our calendars control us; we equate busyness with productivity, so we're constantly doing things (good things, but not always best). Your value and self-worth come from both the things you do and the people you're around—always going. 4) Addiction to Stimulation: because of phones and television, we've rewired our brain to desire constant input (picking up a phone at first sign of “boredom”). 5) *Fear of Facing Ourselves—quite possibly the biggest reason—we're afraid of what we might find out about ourselves if we sit in silence too long with *only* our thoughts. Maybe we fear what God might lay on our hearts, knowing they could completely redirect us from what we've become too comfortable with.

—True silence and solitude probably seems extremely uncomfortable, but what if this discipline actually renews you. What if silence and solitude has a direct connection with growing in Christlikeness, and you're self-sabotaging? —**When we devote ourselves to silence and solitude we will discover two main blessings that form us more into the likeness of Christ.**

MOVEMENT 1:

—If you've ever been to a large sporting arena or an event where a mass of people are concentrated in one location, you might find that using your cell phone is challenging—unreceived calls/texts, dropped calls/trouble sending text messages. However, if you step away from that gathering, eventually the signal improves and you get clear communication. —Jesus gave us this example, and we should follow suit. —**Luke 5:15-16:** [Jesus had just healed a man of leprosy and the word got out]. *15 But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. 16 But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.* —I find it interesting that there were more people who needed the healing and compassionate touch of Jesus, and yet Jesus reached a point in his humanity in which he knew the best thing to do was withdraw himself from the craziness. —**Mark 1:32-35:** [Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law—word must have gotten out] *That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door. 34 And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. 35 And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.* —Jesus had to be exhausted, but he found it important enough to get up before the sun rose and go to a desolate place, and check instagram and scroll through Tik Tok. No! —Both instances in these desolate places, he prayed! He removed himself from the busyness of the crowds, in order to encounter His Father, just as Moses used to pitch a tent outside of the Israelite camp to meet with God (Ex. 33:7, 11). **Solitude and silence provide opportunities to encounter God.**

MOVEMENT 2:

—All of us have had days, where life is really hard and it's one difficult thing stacked on top of another, and these things are so weighty that they need to be processed, and yet there's no time. One can quickly become mentally and

emotionally fatigued. —Many of us know the story of Jesus walking on water, but I think we forget the context around the story and divorce ourselves from the experience from Jesus' perspective. This has been a very long day for Jesus. Hours earlier he was with his disciples, and he found out that John the Baptist was killed by Herod (Mt. 14:1-12), so what does he do? —**Matt. 14:13-15, 22-23** [tell/explain] *Now when Jesus heard this, **he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.** But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15 Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ...[Feeding of Five Thousand]...* What would you do? Where would your mind be right now? How would you feel? 22 *Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, **he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.** When evening came, **he was there alone.*** —I'm sure Jesus was fatigued—mentally, emotionally, and physically, and the most important thing he believed to do was to retreat on a mountainside and pray. —And it's a good thing he created the opportunity to do so, because a storm was coming. **You never know when a storm is going to come, so take advantage of the opportunities to regain strength and clarity of mind in silence and solitude.** To make matters more chaotic *after* the storm when they landed, the crowds swarmed them again (vs. 34-35).

—It seems the busier and more hectic things got for Christ, the more intentionally he was about getting away. The busier we are, the more we should probably retreat to quiet places to be refueled by God. Longevity in ministry, and just life, is knowing when to say "no" and prioritizing times of silence; there is always more to do in ministry (**The Dam overlook in The Dalles). There will always be more demands of you in life.

—If a go, go, go mentality wasn't sustainable for Christ, what makes us think we can sustain that pace? Just because the world *constantly* busies itself with distracting gadgets and social gatherings doesn't mean we should too. —Schedule time to be alone and silent. Take hold of the quiet opportunities: those unusual moments of a quiet house, because the rest of the family is gone ("I should watch a war movie with the volume up...LOL) keep the tv off, put the phone away, and place the book aside and just put your thoughts on God and listen in silence.

—The craziness of life can be a lot like murking up a beautiful clear creek as the constant motion of walking and jumping only stirs up the dirt so one can no longer see the bottom; it's only when one slows down to stop that things settle, so you can finally see the bottom clearly again. —We need still, quiet moments in order to see things clearly and function at the highest capacity, so that we can image God the best way possible. Solitude and silence to hear our *OWN* thoughts and processes. —**Isaiah 30:15** *In returning and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.*

—**Solitude and silence provide rest, clarity, and strength.**

CONCLUSION:

—I got some friendly push back years ago when I promoted our spring Men's Retreat, because I used the word "retreat." Criticism: It's not manly—men don't retreat. My response: Jesus did! Retreats are strategic in nature. —Retreating to a place of solitude is one of the most loving things we can do for those we care about. **We always retreat to reengage with the community, so that we aren't giving those we love our leftovers.** We don't retreat because we're weak, we retreat so that we remain strong. —The mental, emotional, and spiritual benefits¹ habitually practicing solitude with the Lord will only serve to help us to better love those around us.

—Circle back to 2017—on the verge of burnout: —Went for a night to Round Lake to refuel and that one night by myself recharged me. —Practicing silence, solitude, and prayer helps us come to the place of seeing God as enough...ultimately the one in charge. It's a discipline that helps us combat our own god-complex that a busy and chaotic life can begin to instill in us, where we make everything about ourselves and try to control the narratives.

—Encouragement: Spend 20 min a day in silence (no phone, book, music). —Make it a habit to go for a walk, bike ride, hike with the phone off—talking with God and being alone with your thoughts. —Be strategic with your calendar—schedule a day or a few hours of solitude.

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Closing Benediction: Psalm 62:5-8

¹ Emotional & Relational benefit: Greater self-awareness, healthier relationships. Spiritual Benefits: Deeper Connection with God, and renewed sense of purpose and direction. Physical Benefits: improved sleep quality, lower blood pressure/heart rate; strong immune system.