

SOLITUDE

DESIRE to leave people behind and enter into time alone with God

DEFINITION The practice of solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God. Solitude is a "container discipline" for the practice of other spiritual disciplines.

SCRIPTURE

"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." (Mark 1:35)

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." (1 Kings 19:11)

"Let him sit alone in silence for the LORD has laid it on him." (Lamentations 3:28)

PRACTICE INCLUDES

- giving God time and space that is not in competition with social contact, noise or stimulation
- taking a retreat
- observing sabbath refreshment by abstaining from constant interaction with others, information and activities
- addressing your addiction to being seen
- communing with God alone while you walk or run by yourself • practicing disciplines alone: study, prayer, examen, journaling and so forth

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT

- freedom from the need to be occupied and stimulated
- moving away from letting the world "squeeze you into its mold" (Romans 12:2)
- liberation from constantly living your life in reference to other people
- quieting the internal noise so you can better listen to God
- giving yourself time and space to internalize what you already know
- speaking only what you hear from God rather than out of your store of opinions
- including solitude and retreat as part of your lifestyle

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How and when do you resist or avoid being alone?
2. What tends to pop into your mind when you are alone?
3. What do you resort to doing when alone?
4. What troubles you or makes you antsy about being alone?
5. When have you felt most comfortable being alone? Most uncomfortable?
6. What sense of God do you have when you are alone?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. In a place where you can't be interrupted, intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Recognize that the Lord is as near as your own breathing. Inhale God's breath of life; exhale all that weighs on you. Simply be alone with God. • When it is time to return to others, leave the presence of God gently. Carry the sense of being alone with God with you into the next thing.

2. ***Spend fifteen minutes or more alone with God. You can do an activity if you wish: walk, run, drive, iron. Dedicate the time ahead of you to God. • After the time is up, consider how it was for you to be alone with God. Was it hard? Good? Did God speak to you in any way?***

3. Make the time you spend in the shower each morning your alone time with God. Present yourself to your Creator—all of your body, all of the dirt that has accumulated in your soul, all that God has made you to be. Let the water from the shower remind you of the water of life that nourishes and changes you. Let the warmth touch you with love. If you like a cold shower, let the bracing impact call you to live your life to the full. Offer yourself to God for the day. Thank him for the alone time he spends with you.

4. Set aside half a day for time alone with God. Go to a retreat center, quiet chapel or park. Don't stay in your home. Take only your Bible.

Resources on Solitude

Invitation to Solitude and Silence by Ruth Haley Barton

Surrender to Love by David Benner

"The purpose of prayer, the sacraments and spiritual direction is to awaken us." - Thomas Keating

COMMUNITY

DESIRE to express and reflect the self-donating love of the Trinity by investing in and journeying with others

DEFINITION Christian community exists when believers connect with each other in authentic and loving ways that encourage growth in Christ. They engage in transparent relationships that cultivate, celebrate and make evident Christ's love for all the world.

SCRIPTURE

"I am writing you these instructions so that ... you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach

and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:15-16)

PRACTICE INCLUDES

- practicing the biblical "one anothers"
- cultivating authentic relationships that connect you to God and his plan to serve and love this world
- exercising your gifts in fellowship with others
- engaging in hospitality that promotes honest sharing and caring
- participating in a small group or covenant group
- sharing life with an accountability partner or prayer partner
- engaging in mission with others

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT

- keeping company with Jesus in everything that does and doesn't happen in community
- working against the spirit of isolation and independence that cripples the church by practicing the "one anothers" within the body of Christ
- moving from independence and self-absorption to others-centeredness
- growing in love and concern for others
- having a relational rather than a functional definition of identity
- practicing Matthew 18:15 by offering and receiving forgiveness and reconciliation
- revealing God's love through caring for others
- speaking the truth in love
- participating in a small group where you are known and encouraged to grow in faith
- becoming part of a community that is larger than yourself and your own goals, possessions and achievements

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is appealing or unappealing to you about being an independent operator?

2. How do you respond to the words

- dependent
- independent
- interdependent

How does your response affect your experience of Christian community?

3. What kind of connection does Christ want you to have with Christian brothers and sisters?

4. How does the life you are leading reflect the value Christ places on belonging to the family of God?

5. When has the body of Christ nurtured and sustained you? What was it like for you?

6. What gifts do you bring to the body of Christ?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Choose one of the "one anothers"- "love one another," "serve one another," "pray for one another," "forgive one another" **Practice living one particular "one another" every day for a week.** • What is this practice like for you?
2. Have a "We Celebrate Your Birth, O Beautiful Child of God" party. Write notes of gratitude to the person. Write prayers of desire for his or her life. Put all these in a scrapbook. book.
3. Ask someone to tell you their story. Listen to the story. Listen to the story as deeply as you can. Tell the person soon how much it means to you to hear the story. • How does the story give you a deeper understanding of your friend, of God and of yourself?
4. Include others in family gatherings. Practice what it is to belong to God's family-not just your nuclear family.
5. Begin a thank-you list. Thank God for the people in your life who have helped you grow. • Write a song or poem about God's good gift of family.
6. If you have something against a brother or sister in Christ, go to that person and make peace with them. • Meditate on Romans 12:18. Journal your response.
7. Join a church, a small group, a mission group. Become part of a community of faith and see how this imparts Christ to you in new and deep ways.

Resources on Community

The Safest Place on Earth by Larry Crabb

"No one person can fulfill all your needs. But the community can truly hold you. The community can let you experience the fact that, beyond your anguish, there are human hands that hold you and show you God's faithful love."- Henri Nouwen

[Solitude and Community - Tim Mackie](#)

[59 One Another's in the New Testament](#)