

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

MARCH 15 - 19, 2021

LENTEN SERIES 2021
FEB 21 - APR 4

New Rhythms



Solitude

- During the next week, set aside ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes a day for solitude at a time that works for you. It could be morning, over your lunch hour, during quiet moments after dinner or before you go to bed, or you might choose a more extended time on the weekend. Be realistic regarding the time you choose based on what's going on in your family and in your life at work.
- The goal of this week's practice is for you to learn to begin your times in solitude by being quiet and letting your soul come out and rest in God's presence. You might want to use your breath prayer as the prayer that helps you enter into your time of silence. If you get distracted, pray your breath prayer as a way of bringing you back to your desire and intention to be present with God.
- Find a spot where you can be quiet and alone. Settle into a comfortable position in your body and sit quietly for a few moments, breathing deeply, becoming aware of God's presence with you and your desire to be present with God.
- Begin to notice what is true about your life. Don't rush this or force it. Let your soul venture out and say something to you that perhaps you have had a hard time acknowledging. If you are having a hard time getting started, the following questions are a helpful way to begin:
 - *Is there a particular joy you are celebrating?*
 - *A loss you are grieving?*
 - *Are there tears that have been waiting to be shed?*
 - *A question that is stirring?*
 - *Anger, frustration, or some other thought or emotion that you need to express to God but just haven't had the opportunity?*

- Sit with what comes into your awareness, becoming conscious of God's presence with you in whatever you are aware of. Don't try to do anything except experience it. Don't scare it away. Feel the difference between trying to fix it and just being with it. Feel the difference between doing something with it and resting with it. Feel the difference between trying to fight it and letting God fight for you.
- What does it mean for you to be still and let God act for you in this particular area? What are you able to know in the stillness that you have not been able to know in the noise and busyness of your life?
- After you spend time in silence, you may also want to use this time to journal your thoughts as prayers to God or record what you feel God is saying to you using the journal pages provided.

Source:

Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms Participant's Guide: Spiritual Practices That Nourish Your Soul and Transform Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011)

MONDAY

Luke 6:12-13; Mark 6:30-32; Psalm 62:1-7

“Solitude is the practice of quieting every inner and outer voice to attend to God. ... It is not so much a turning to God to get something but to be *with* Someone.” (Peter Scazzero) The Lord embraced this. *“Though He was ... God ... [the Word] emptied Himself, by taking the form of a [Man] and humbled Himself”* (Philippians 2:6-8). The Man Jesus of Nazareth needed and sought solitude continually, prayerfully seeking the Father for strength, guidance and encouragement.

I am inclined to emphasize Jesus’ deity, sometimes diminishing that He became a Man (John 1:14) to join us in our human frailty, vulnerability and need. Our Advocate and Example chose this willingly (John 10:18) to our benefit, making Himself fully dependent upon the Father and Spirit throughout His first coming mission. Accordingly, Jesus prayed in Luke 6:12-13 before taking actions that changed the course of history: choosing and calling His disciples.

“After feeding the five thousand ... Jesus, while the storm gathered over His disciples on the lake, went up into a mountain to pray (alone). [The Savior spent] a whole night of prayer before choosing His disciples ... And we read of Him going into a desert place with His disciples, and to Olivet, and oft-times resorting to the garden where Judas found Him, where, in the dead of night, the traitor naturally sought Him. ... His prayers impress nothing on us more powerfully than the reality of His manhood. [Jesus], who possesses all things, bends His knees to [commune with the Father].” (Whitney Hoppler)

Three of the many biblical examples of Jesus and solitude follow: “... crowds gathered to hear Him and to be healed ... But He would withdraw to desolate places and pray” (Luke 5:15-16). “After He had dismissed the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone” (Matthew 14:23). “... rising ... while it was still dark, He departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35).

What did Jesus know that you and I don't? As God the Son, everything! Following Christ includes, among other things, practicing restorative solitude to draw closer to God.

QUESTIONS

Why did Jesus regularly remove Himself from others, seeking solitude? What does this say about His humanity? What does it say to us about our related need?

Lenten Practice

As you begin your times of Solitude take the first few minutes with one of these “breath prayers”:

- As you breathe in say: “Jesus, Son of David” and as you breathe out say: “Have mercy on me.”
- Or... “Abba Father” ... “I belong to you.”
- Or ... “Holy Father” ... “May I be holy for you.”

TUESDAY

Luke 6:12-13; Luke 10:38-42; Psalm 46:1-10

I remember boredom as agonizing during my youth. As an adult, however, boredom has become an elusive luxury. Even amidst COVID's slowdown, things continue to feel rushed in our super-charged, information-soaked, impatient and entitled culture. An alarming byproduct: attention spans have shrunk by 50% over the past decade. (Brandon Gaille) Another casualty: the discipline of solitude is becoming a lost art ... to our increasing peril.

“Modern society offers little opportunity for silence. Smart phones and mobile devices keep messages, emails, streaming music and video platforms, and [ever-present] social media feeds ... You can't even pump gas or take a cab ride without clips of news, entertainment, and advertising before your eyes and ears. There are two realities we need to accept: first, silence is an integral part of the development of our interior lives—we cannot develop one without silence; and second, in the modern world, silence is something we have to actively pursue—it rarely comes to us organically anymore.” (Catherine Birri)

Jesus understood the danger of inhumane busyness—He sought time alone with the Father whenever possible. The Lord was not only radically counter-cultural then, but would be viewed that way today. “There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence ... activism and overwork. ... The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace ... [and] kills the root of inner wisdom.” (Thomas Merton)

Consider these other relevant quotes. “What we need most ... to make progress is to be silent before this great God ... For the language He best hears is silent love.” (St. John of the Cross) “A talkative soul lacks both the essential virtues and intimacy with God. ... [Such] a soul ... disturbs the silence of others.” (St. Faustina) “In reality, only in silence does man succeed in hearing in the depth of his conscience the voice of God, which really makes him free.” (Pope John Paul II)

“In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue and peace is spoken.” (Pope Francis) I encourage you to meet God in stillness each day this week at the foot of the cross.

QUESTIONS

What are some of the consequences of our spending too little alone time with God? What does “silence is something we have to actively pursue” (C. Birri) mean and what are its implications?

Lenten Practice

Besides taking 10 or 15 minutes to just be with Jesus, why not try today (at least for a significant time) turning off all noise. Continue through the day, offering it to God. Be in the present, doing what you are doing with a listening heart. What is it like for you? What distracts you?

WEDNESDAY

Luke 1:5-23, 57-80

This week's centerpiece is the spiritual discipline of silence and solitude. Consider where God imposed this on one with a special mission: Priest Zechariah's calling to name his son John (aka "the Baptist"). Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth (the virgin Mary's relative: Luke 1:36), had been childless throughout their marriage and exceeded childbearing years. Zachariah doubted Gabriel upon learning of Elizabeth's miraculous, prayer-answering pregnancy, provoking a season of muteness.

"While ... Gabriel's words (muting Zachariah) can seem like a punishment, we might also read them as an invitation. ... God's faith in Zechariah is enough, even when Zechariah's faith falters. In the time of silence ... something changes within him. ... What happened between Zechariah and God then? What turned Zechariah from being a person who argued with the angel ... to one who offers a canticle proclaiming praise, salvation and freedom (Luke 1:68-79)?" (Mary Berzins McCoy)

"[Was] silence ... a necessary condition that Zechariah needed ... [to] reflect upon Angel Gabriel's powerful message? ... By naming his son John ... fulfilling Angel Gabriel's prophesy and surrendering John to ... the will of God, Zechariah regains control of his speech ... By letting go of his need to control and to *know*, Zechariah received a tangible sign of faith." (Christopher Chok)

"God often speaks most clearly to us in moments when we can quiet our own minds and voices. Words can sometimes be more reflective

of my own anxieties and concerns than of God’s action. While prayerful words can be ... beautiful ... they can also be distractions from fully placing myself in God’s hands. Sometimes our words ... [establish] our own limits. Silence makes room for the fullness of God’s dynamic and healing power. ... In the quiet, God is still at work. ... In [practicing] silence, we enter more deeply into God’s mystery ... [and] learn to trust in God’s transforming power.” (McCoy) “Without silence, words lose their meaning.” (Henri Nouwen)

Zachariah’s period of speechlessness was literally a “pregnant pause.” However, God used it to prepare him and build anticipation both for John’s future ministry as well as the coming Messiah’s. Beyond your regular prayer and devotional time, seek the Lord daily in reflective, available stillness. Then see what God will do—with your faith, personal ministry, and kingdom impact.

QUESTIONS

Why was Zachariah silenced for a season by the Angel Gabriel? What action broke the silence, giving Zachariah his voice again? What does “Without silence, words lose their meaning” (H. Nouwen) mean?

Lenten Practice

- Today as you begin your time, intentionally place yourself in the presence of Jesus.
- Turn your palms down and begin to drop your cares, worries, agendas and expectations into Jesus’ hands. Let go of all that is heavy or burdensome. Relax. Breathe deeply.
- When you have given your cares to Jesus, turn your palms up on your knees. Open your hands to receive God’s presence, word and love. Listen.

THURSDAY

Job 1:12-2:13; Job 22:1-11

Continuing our “silence is golden” theme, let’s touch upon Job, the Bible’s classic book on human suffering amidst God’s sovereign almightiness, goodness and love. God allowed Satan to torment Job and inflict losses and discomfort, prompting an unparalleled theological dialog. Yet God ultimately redeemed all that Job had lost—and more—given the enduring faithfulness of both.

Job’s comrades began well, but three lapsed into misguidedness. “Job’s friends did at least three things right ... First, they came to him when he was suffering. Second, they empathized with him ... Third, they spent time with him. ... They were with him for seven days before they offered their (ruinous) advice. They commiserated with their friend in silence.” (GotQuestions.org) At first they acted righteously and helpfully, sympathetically remaining with their afflicted friend.

There is much to learn, however, in considering Job’s colleagues’ missteps. “We should not assume that troubles are the sure sign of God’s judgment (cf. John 9:1-3). ... Job’s would-be comforters offered all sorts of possibilities for why Job was going through such misery but, adding insult to injury, they focused on the theory that Job must have unconfessed sin in his life and that God was punishing him ... Knowing his conscience was clear, Job grew weary of their accusations ... Trying to assign blame during a time of loss can turn us into ‘*miserable comforters*’ (Job 16:2).” (GotQuestions.org)

Have you ever suffered loss, only to be hurt further by others' insensitivity? Often unhelpful things to say include: "Was (the person who passed) a believer?" "They're in a better place now." "God works in mysterious ways; I'm sure He'll use this for good." Most unsupportive, however, is avoiding those grieving entirely due to potential awkwardness.

"When we are aware of a friend who is hurting, we can follow the positive example of [Job's companions] by going to the person, mourning with [them], and spending time together. Our physical presence with a hurting friend can be a great comfort in and of itself, even if we have no words to say." (GotQuestion?org) At such times, "*weep with those who weep*" (Romans 12:15) instead of "dispensing truth."

QUESTIONS

What did Job's friends do well when joining him initially in his agony? Why did Job subsequently call them "miserable comforters"? What's a good philosophy when trying to comfort a grieving friend?

Lenten Practice

Make the time you spend in the shower each morning be 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 fullest. Offer yourself to God for the day. Thank Him for the alone time He spends with you.

FRIDAY

Psalm 63:5-8; Lamentations 3:21-29; James 4:8-10

Silence, availability, solitude and reflection are essential to learning to listen to God. Withdrawing from relationships and distractions for stillness tunes our hearts to hear and respond to God's leading. Today let's consider some practical ways to exercise this discipline.

"Elements [of God-seeking solitude include]: Stopping—give up control and trust God ... Centering ... [as] we move into God's presence and rest there. ... As you breathe in, ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. As you breathe out, exhale all that is sinful, false ... Silence ... the practice of quieting every inner and outer voice to attend to God. ... [And, finally] Scripture." (Scazzero, emphasis added)

"[When you regularly] encounter God through silence and solitude, He'll change your soul ... Pay attention to what's stirring ... [including your] feelings of desperation and desire ... Choose a regular time and place to get away from life as usual and spend [God-seeking time habitually] ... [Offer Him] a simple prayer and [sit comfortably, while attentively]. ... Don't let anything distract you from devoting yourself regularly to times of seeking God in silence and solitude. ... Ask God to help you quiet your mind and listen to Him with your spirit ... If grief is weighing on your soul, confess it ... When your soul feels grateful for God's love, express that gratitude. ...

"Let emptiness lead you to God's fulfillment. ... Feel the pain of your emptiness as it carves out space in your soul for you to receive more of God's presence. ... Rather than hiding from God ... allow the truth of who you are to surface during solitude and silence—and face the reality of the

person you see ... Remember that God loves you deeply and unconditionally [so] ask Him to meet you right where you are and help you grow ... Be alert for the Holy Spirit witnessing to your spirit.” (Hoppler)

“Stopping for [regular, contemplative time alone with God] is not meant to add another ‘to-do’ to our already busy schedules. It is a resetting of our entire lives toward a new destination—God Himself.” (Scazzero) Are you practicing this life-changing, renewing spiritual discipline? If not, why not?

Lenten Practice

Schedule in a few hours to be alone with God this weekend.

1. Take the first 5-10 minutes in silence using the palms up and palms down exercise or the breath prayer.
2. Go for a walk with God. Notice signs of God’s love. Read nature as a revelation of God. Thank God for how He reveals Himself in His creation.
3. Eat a snack in the presence of God. Let the process of eating remind you what it means to be nourished through God and His Word.
4. Listen to your desires. What is life-giving to you? What is life-thwarting? Where do you find love, joy, and peace in your life? Where does it seem absent? Where are you sad? Where are you glad? Pray about what you see.
5. Consider the Scriptural names and metaphors that reveal God’s nature and character: Good Shepherd, Comforter, Healer, Lord, Father, Mighty God, etc. Let the names draw you into worship.
6. Thank God for making you and living within you. Prayerfully read Psalm 139.
7. Imagine Jesus on the cross. Pour your sufferings and worries into His wounds. Use Psalm 56 to express your troubles.
8. Pray for the people you love and for the world and its needs. Take your time to listen for the prayer Jesus may be praying for these people and situations.
9. As you return from your walk, what do you want to leave behind with God. What do you want to take back with you?

Sources:

- This week's daily practices are taken from Adele Ahlberg Calhoun's book, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005).
- Peter Scazzero's quotes are from his book and workshop series, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).
- Whitney Hoppler's quotes can be found at <https://www.crosswalk.com/fait/spiritual-life/how-to-meet-god-through-silence-and-solitude.html>.
- Brandon Gaille's quoted statistic is from <https://brandongaille.com/average-attention-span-statistics-and-trends/>.
- Catherine Birri's, St. John of the Cross's, St. Faustina's, Pope John Paul II's and Pope Francis' quotes can be found at <https://www.coraevans.com/blog/article/7-most-beautiful-quotes-on-the-power-of-silence>.
- Thomas Merton's quote can be found at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/855888-there-is-a-pervasive-form-of-contemporary-violence-to-which>
- Marina Berzins McCoy's quotes are from <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/zechariah-and-holy-silence/>.
- Christopher Chok's quote can be found at <https://christcenteredconversations.com/2017/12/20/silenced-by-truth-zechariahs-response-to-angel-gabriel/>.
- Henri Nouwen's quote is from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/henri_nouwen_395351.
- GotQuestions.org quotes are from <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jobs-friends.html> and <https://www.gotquestions.org/miserable-comforters.html>.



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