

## March Discipleship Practice: Sacred Space (Solitude and Silence)

“Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment.” – Richard Foster

Space can be sacred, just as a day can be sacred (Sabbath). “Sacred” means “set apart for God’s holy purposes.” We create sacred space when we make time in our lives for solitude and silence. By “solitude” we mean time alone with God. By “silence” we mean escaping from noise and distraction. How often do you spend time alone with God, escaping the noise and distractions of life? What would happen if today you gave God an hour of your undivided attention?

Jesus practiced both solitude and silence. He knew what it meant to get away from the crowds and spend time alone with God. He began his ministry, led by the Spirit, into a period of 40 days of solitude and silence in the wilderness (Read Matthew 4:1-3) Before choosing his 12 disciples Jesus spent the night out on a mountainside in solitude. (Luke 6:12-13) During the three years that Jesus spent with his disciples he often slipped away from them (sometimes early in the morning while it was still dark) and spent time alone with God. (Mark 1:35-36) After receiving the news of John the Baptist’s death, Jesus withdrew to a solitary place. (Matt 14:13)

When you consider the word “solitude” what comes to mind? Does it thrill your heart or does it sound lonely?

Solitude is not simply being alone – it is intentionally being alone with God. Solitude is one way that we can make space in our busy lives to meet with God. Solitude is different than getting physical rest. Solitude is spiritual rest. In the same way that physical rest can recharge our bodies, spiritual rest can recharge our souls.

We practice being with God in solitude and silence so that we can more faithfully be with God in all of life, even the busyness.

Henri Nouwen in *The Way of the Heart* says, “Solitude is the furnace of transformation.” Transformation is not an easy process. It is an inside out work that only God can do in our lives. When Paul says that he is confident that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” he is talking about transformation. Transformation is God’s promise to us, but it doesn’t occur when we ignore God or don’t spend time with God.

It is in solitude and silence that we put away the obvious distractions of life and give God our undivided attention. When we make time for solitude and silence we are responding to Jesus’ invitation. Jesus said to his disciples, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” (Mark 6:31) It is also an opportunity to think deeply about what matters. When was the last time you sat alone, without any distractions, and thought deeply about your life? Worry and thinking deeply are similar, except one happens with God and one happens apart from God. Have we forgot how to think deeply?

And solitude and silence is an invitation for God to search us. (Ps 139) God “does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outer appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Sam 16:7) When we invite God to search us he always does a good work in us.

## PRACTICE

The practice for the month of March is to enter into a period of solitude and silence at least once a week. This will take some intentionality and planning. Set aside an hour (or more if you can) each week and use the following points as a guide:

1. Look for a place where you will be free from interruptions. No people, no phones.
2. Take a Bible with you and a journal.
3. Remember that God has invited you to be present. Enter into the solitude and silence by giving him thanks. Express your love and gratitude.
4. Share with God what you desire from spending time with him in solitude. (To know him better, to love him more, to experience his peace, etc.)
5. Give God your undivided attention. Wait quietly in his presence – Be still and know that he is God. (Ps 46:10) When your mind wanders (and it will) gently return to thinking about him. Remember that this is practice not perfection.
6. In the solitude and silence, practice thinking deeply about life. Read a Psalm or practice Lectio Divina. Apply Scripture to your living.
7. Share your experience of solitude and silence with your discipleship group.