

Breaking the Addiction to Busy, Pt. 4: Silence & Solitude

Victory Life Church, Central — Sunday, March 2, 2025

Introduction

Luke 5:16 (NLT)¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

The bottom line that I have wanted to stress through this series is simply this: being an apprentice of Jesus means moving a lot slower than American cultural tides manipulate us into. We cannot be intimate with God, deeply connected to him and each other, yet simultaneously be hurried and busy. Being busy is not a badge of honor but a malady of the soul in many cases. A full schedule does not have to mean a busy and hurried soul, but rarely do those things not correlate.

It's hard to be hurried and follow the unhurried Jesus.

Hurry and busy kill intimacy. Being both hurried and loving are incompatible. If we want to be more like Jesus, we cannot try to outrun him. We must learn to walk at his pace and become the kind of person whose natural pace is unhurried and loving.

“If you want to experience the *life* of Jesus, you have to adopt his *lifestyle*.”¹

We need more than good advice and self-help tips; we need transformation. In explaining the habits that contribute to *unhurrying* our lives, the goal is never the discipline in and of itself. All spiritual disciplines are about being with Jesus; cultivating intimacy with him. If relational intimacy with the Lord is not what you value most, then no amount of new habits or disciplines will be sustained.

Things which matter *most* must never be at the mercy of things which matter *least*.

If relational intimacy with Jesus is what matters most, then it must become a priority. None of us will unintentionally drift into a deeper relationship with Jesus. Without intention, focus, and discipline, we will drift along the cultural tide of distraction and emptiness.

“We...are distracting ourselves into **spiritual oblivion**.”² ~ Ronald Rolheiser

Spiritual Disciplines that help us slow our lives down:

Unhurried Habits: **Sabbath** — **Simplicity** — **Silence & Solitude**

Do we want to become people of compassion, freedom, presence, care, and wisdom? This is the character of Jesus. As his disciples, if we want Jesus' *life*, we must adopt Jesus' *lifestyle*, the habits and disciplines he engaged in, in order to become the kind of person he was.

Jesus and the Wilderness

Luke 5:16 (NLT)¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

“Wilderness” — (Greek) *erēmos* — desert, desolate or deserted place, solitary or lonely place, quiet place

The “wilderness” is a place where Jesus sought to be alone with the Father. He saw this as an indispensable part of his life, not just once, but very frequently, “often.” Time spent in the wilderness, the desolate place, the solitary and quiet place, was time spent cultivating intimacy with the Father.

Luke 5:16 (NLT)¹⁶ But Jesus **often** withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

The wilderness is not considered a space for a little “me time.” It is not a place of isolation for self-loathing and misery. The wilderness is a place of communion and fellowship with God. This is the spiritual discipline of solitude and silence. Solitude is not isolation. Isolation is about escape. Solitude and silence are about engagement with God, communion and intimacy with the One who matters most to us.

“Solitude is a place. It is a place in time that is set apart for God and God alone, a time when we unplug and withdraw from the noise of interpersonal interactions, from the noise, busyness and constant stimulation associated with life in the company of others.”³ ~ Ruth Haley Barton

“Silence deepens our experience of solitude, because in silence, we choose to unplug not only from the constant stimulation of life in the company of others, but also from our own addition to the noise, words and activity.”

How can intimacy be developed if there isn’t time alone and quiet? In our marriages, it’s not that you cannot experience a kind of intimacy when with others—at the dinner table with kids, driving in the car, holding hands at a movie or play. But if those times in public and with others are not undergirded by private intimacy, eventually, they are a shallow facade of a deep relationship.

Intimacy with God is the ultimate goal of silence and solitude.

Solitude and Silence (“in the wilderness” / the secret place) may be one of the primary ways we cultivate intimacy with God; at least, that seems to be the way Jesus lived.

John 5:19–20 (NLT)¹⁹ So Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. *In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished.*

Ideas: 5, 10, 20, or 30 minutes in the morning or evening; quiet walks (without headphones), fast lunch to be alone with God; a half day once a month to be alone and quiet with God; an hour on the Sabbath, try not speaking for a day...

Why does Solitude and Silence matter so much? What happens when we engage in this discipline?

Distraction to Attention — Apathy to Affection — Compulsion to Compassion

Silence & Solitude

► **Distraction to Attention** — Apathy to Affection — Compulsion to Compassion

We are losing our ability to pay attention. We now, generationally, have the attention span of a goldfish.⁴ A survey from Microsoft found that 77 percent of young adults answered “‘yes’ when asked, ‘When nothing is occupying my attention, the first thing I do is reach for my phone.’”

“This new normal of hurried digital distraction is robbing us of the ability to be present... How do we have any kind of spiritual life at all if we can't pay attention longer than a goldfish? How do you pray, read the scriptures, sit under a teaching at church, or rest well on the Sabbath when every chance you get, you reach for the dopamine dispenser that is your phone?”⁵ ~ John Mark Comer

In the disciplined repetition of silence and solitude, we begin to slowly relearn how to pay attention to what matters. Again, the point is not to be quiet and alone. The goal is to be with Jesus without distraction. When we relearn how to pay attention to what matters most, our love and affection for him will grow.

“We move through life in such a distracted way that we do not even take the time and rest to wonder if any of the things we think, say, or do are worth thinking, saying or doing.”⁶ ~ Henri Nouwen

“Simply to refrain from talking, without a heart listening to God, is not silence.”⁷ ~ Richard Foster

► Distraction to Attention — **Apathy to Affection** — Compulsion to Compassion

What matters most as followers of Jesus is to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.” (Mark 12:30) But how much do we love God if we do not desire or commit to spend time with him? Maybe it’s not that we don’t really love God; we just no longer know how to sit still with him. Keeping a commitment to spending time with God in silence and solitude realigns our love for God, rekindling our affection for him. The noise and busyness of life make our love grow cold.

Revelation 2:4–5 (NLT)⁴ “But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first! ⁵ Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don’t repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.

“Ministry can be fruitful only if it grows out of a direct and intimate encounter with our Lord.”⁸ ~ Henri Nouwen

“Silence is the discipline by which the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive.”⁹ ~ Henri Nouwen

“What it says about the inward emptiness of our lives if we must *always* turn on the tape player or radio to make sure something is happening around us.”¹⁰ ~ Dallas Willard

Maybe our sense of God’s absence or silence is far more about our own inability to be quiet and alone with him.

“The reason we live in a culture increasingly without faith is not because science has somehow disproved the unprovable, but because the white noise of secularism has removed the very stillness in which it might endure or be reborn...If the churches came to understand that the greatest threat to faith today is not hedonism but distraction, perhaps they might begin to appeal anew to a frazzled digital generation.”¹¹ ~ Andrew Sullivan

► Distraction to Attention — Apathy to Affection — **Compulsion to Compassion**

We are rarely aware of the hidden drivers that are behind our behaviors. Many times, our ego, our insecurity, our need for approval or acceptance, our desire for wealth or power, drive our decisions and behaviors. We use our words and actions among others to posture ourselves.

“Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude, we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self.”¹² ~ Henri Nouwen

“In solitude, I get rid of my scaffolding... The confrontation with our own frightening nothingness forces us to surrender ourselves totally and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Henri Nouwen describes solitude as the furnace of transformation. Solitude is the place where we sit long enough with God in order for our compulsions to be exposed and we see the things in our lives that are in need of God’s loving touch and transformation.

“The normal course of day-to-day human interactions locks us into patterns of feeling, thought, and action that are geared to a world set against God. Nothing but solitude can allow the development of a freedom from the ingrained behaviors that hinder our integration into God’s order.”¹³ ~ Dallas Willard

“In solitude, we confront our own soul with its obscure forces and conflicts that escape our attention when we are interacting with others... We can only survive solitude if we cling to Christ there. And yet what we find of him in that solitude enables us to return to society as free persons.”

By “integration into God’s order”, he means how we live our lives in God’s kingdom. When our lives are lived in unbroken connection to technologies and others, we become unaware of what really controls our behaviors.

Luke 5:15-16 (NLT)¹⁵ But despite Jesus' instructions, the report of his power spread even faster, and vast crowds came to hear him preach and to be healed of their diseases.¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

After Jesus's big first day of ministry, after he had spent 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus was a big hit. He was incredibly popular and in high demand. It would have been easy to get caught up into the mania and be controlled by the praises and needs of the people.

Mark 1:35-38 (NLT)³⁵ Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. ³⁶ Later Simon and the others went out to find him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸ But Jesus replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came."

In the wilderness, in alone time with the Father, Jesus was able to gain clarity as to what was most needed from his ministry. Silence and Solitude are essential to gaining clarity in what matters most and how to live free and simply.

"Solitude shows us the way to let our behavior be shaped not by the compulsions of the world but by our new mind, the mind of Christ. Silence prevents us from being suffocated by our wordy world and teaches us to speak the Word of God. Unceasing prayer gives solitude and silence their real meaning."¹⁴ ~ Henri Nouwen

Conclusion

Many will probably think, "Yeah, that's a great idea, but..."

In the early 1700s, there was a woman named Suzanna. She was the mother of **19 children**, 9 of whom tragically died in infancy, and was herself the youngest child of 25 (that's 24 siblings). If you had peered into Suzanna's household, you would have seen her ten children being homeschooled, playing, or the family working the farm, or on some Sunday afternoons leading Sunday school for a hundred people or more. Managing a busy household with ten kids, including homeschooling them, left little time for solitude and silence. However, she was deeply devoted to her faith and personal time with God. To ensure she could pray without interruptions, she developed a simple but effective method:

When she needed time with God, she would sit down and pull her apron over her head. This was a clear signal to her children that she was praying and was not to be disturbed. She committed to more time with God than she did leisure or entertainment, so this was about two hours every day. Despite the chaos of daily life, this practice allowed her to maintain a disciplined spiritual life, which greatly influenced her sons, John and Charles Wesley, who later became key figures in the Methodist movement, some even say they reshaped the future of the Christian church. Susanna Wesley is an incredible example of creative devotion in busy circumstances, showing how even in a hectic household, one can still carve out time for prayer and connection with God.¹⁵

Kids will do what they see, not what you say. They learn more by your example than by your instruction. Let's set a good example of intimacy with God for the next generation.

For busy mothers of young children who struggle with prayer, quiet, and solitude, I highly recommend Ronald Rolheiser's small, but insightful book "Domestic Monastery." One small excerpt from the book:

"The mother who stays home with small children experiences a very real withdrawal from the world. Her existence is certainly monastic. Her tasks and preoccupations remove her from the centers of social life and from the centers of important power... For years, while she is raising small children, her time is not her own, her own needs have to be put into second place, and every time she turns around some hand is reaching out demanding something. Years of this will mature most. It is because of this that she does not need, during this time, to pray for an hour a day. And it is precisely because of this, that the rest of us, we do not have constant contact with small children, need to pray privately daily."¹⁶

Motherhood, when done with humility, sacrificial love, and generosity, works the same transformation that solitude and prayer does.

Recommended Reading

Invitation to Silence and Solitude, by Ruth Haley Barton

Sacred Rhythms, by Ruth Haley Barton

Domestic Monastery, by Ronald Rolheiser

Celebration of Discipline, by Richard J. Foster

The Spirit of the Disciplines, by Dallas Willard

Sanctuary of the Soul, by Richard J. Foster

Prayer: Our Deepest Longing, by Ronald Rolheiser

The Way of the Heart, by Henri Nouwen

¹ John Mark Comer. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. p. 82

² Ronald Rolheiser. *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*. Doubleday, 1999. p. 32-33

³ Ruth Haley Barton. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. p. 32

⁴ Kevin McSpadden. *You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish*. May 14, 2015. <http://time.com/3858309/attention-spans-goldfish>

⁵ John Mark Comer. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. p. 122

⁶ Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Way of the Heart*. Ballantine Books, 1981. p. 11

⁷ Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*. 3rd ed., HarperSanFrancisco, 1998. p. 98

⁸ Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Way of the Heart*. Ballantine Books, 1981. p. 21

⁹ Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Way of the Heart*. Ballantine Books, 1981. p. 45

¹⁰ Dallas Willard. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. New York: HarperCollins. 1988. pp. 163-169

¹¹ Andrew Sullivan. *I Used to Be A Human Being*. New York Times Magazine. September 19, 2016. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2016/09/andrew-sullivan-my-distraction-sickness-and-yours.html>. Accessed 02.04.2025.

¹² Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Way of the Heart*. Ballantine Books, 1981. p. 15

¹³ Dallas Willard. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. New York: HarperCollins. 1988. pp. 160-161

¹⁴ Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Way of the Heart*. Ballantine Books, 1981. p. 91

¹⁵ <https://faithgateway.com/blogs/christian-books/leaving-a-legacy-of-prayer-praying-example-susanna-wesley>

¹⁶ Ronald Rolheiser. *Domestic Monastery*. Paraclete Press, 2019. pp. 9-10