

SESSION 1: WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

1 Timothy 4:7-8; Psalm 42:1-2

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus practice spiritual disciplines?
2. Have you ever trained for something and had to follow a strict discipline? How does that compare to spiritual disciplines?
3. Why are spiritual disciplines vital to our being a disciple of Jesus?
4. Consider how you have grown in your faith? What were the catalysts for growth?
5. What are the biggest obstacles that stand in the way of making spiritual disciplines a part of our daily lives? How can we eliminate these obstacles?
6. *Spiritual disciplines are not about doing, but rather about being.* What does this quote from the video mean to you?
7. **PERSONAL TAKE-HOME:** Look at the next 4 weeks and commit to setting aside at least 15 minutes a day, three times a week for God (outside of church activities). Create accountability by sharing your plan with each other, and encourage and remind one another throughout the week.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

SESSION 2: READING SCRIPTURE

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Psalms 23:1, 27; John 3:16, 15:13, 17:20-21, 20:31;
Proverbs 3:5-6

QUESTIONS

1. When we look at the life of Jesus, how did He use Scripture in His life? How can it help you?
2. How is it possible for the Bible to have the ability to speak truth in whatever circumstance you might find yourself in?
3. How can we experience God's presence through reading Scripture?
4. How does reading the Bible make you confident in the faithfulness of God?
5. How can you use Scripture in your prayers?
6. How can we make reading the Bible a daily habit?
7. To help you in practicing the discipline of reading Scripture, write down three questions that you can ask yourself every time you read a Bible verse/passage (i.e. What does this verse tell you about God?). Share ideas with your group.
8. Read Psalm 27 together. Use the questions you came up with in number 7 to discuss the psalm.

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SESSION 3: PRAYER

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Psalm 3

QUESTIONS

1. When you pray, do you think of yourself as having a conversation with God? How is prayer a conversation?
2. How can you combine praying and reading the Bible to strengthen your trust in God and help bring balance to your life?
3. How has prayer helped you grow and mature?
4. There are many times in life when we search out someone to share what we are feeling. Why is it good for us to also share with God during those moments?
5. Too many times the content and timing of our conversations with God are dictated by what is happening in our life. Why is continuous conversation with God vital to us keeping our spiritual equilibrium?
6. During a prayer, do you change God's mind or does He change yours?
7. Reflect on how David prayed in Psalm 3. Do you pray in times of trouble? In what ways does prayer become a rock for you in "storms" as it did for David?
8. **PERSONAL TAKE-HOME:** Take a few moments this week to write out a prayer to God. Really think about how you want to express to Him your worship, your thanks, your desires, and your intercessions.

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SESSION 4: WORSHIP

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

John4:23-24; Matthew 13:1-9

QUESTIONS

1. Worship is our response to God and our expression of what He means to us. What has your worship expressed to God this week?
2. What are different ways to worship God?
3. Reflecting on your life – why is God worthy of worship?
4. Think back on the last few days. Can you think of a time your language did not display to others that you were a child of God? How could you have reacted differently?
5. How does our complete devotion to God manifest itself in how we live our lives?
6. What daily activity in your life could you change your perspective on in order to worship God while you are doing it?
7. Besides what we've talked about this month, what other spiritual disciplines do you think would be helpful in your spiritual growth?
8. Why are spiritual disciplines important to our relationship with God?

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SESSION 5: FASTING

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Jonah 3:5-10; Isaiah 58; Matthew 3:16-4:4,
6:16-18; Luke 2:37; John 6:35; Acts 14:23

QUESTIONS

1. What are some spiritual purposes that a person might fast for?
2. In addition to going without eating, what are other ways we can fast?
3. In what ways can fasting assist you in keeping your focus on Jesus?
4. Fasting involves a lot of self-control. Is self-control necessary for a Christian life? Why?
5. How does fasting humble you before God?
6. Read Isaiah 58:3-8. What did God say about fasting? Why did Jesus make a point about fasting the right way in Matthew 6:16-18?
7. *Whatever we abstain from when fasting, we replace it with actions dedicated to God.* What are some intentional actions that you could do when fasting?
8. How can fasting help you to kick-start one of the other spiritual disciplines?

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SESSION 6: SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

1 Kings 19:1-19; Psalm 8:3-4, 46:10, 139:14; Mat.
14:23; Mark 1:35, 6:46; Luke 5:16, 6:12; Acts 17:28

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the benefits of spending time in solitude and silence.
2. What can we learn from Elijah's experience in solitude and silence?
3. What can we learn about ourselves in solitude and silence? What can we learn about God?
4. What prevents you from practicing silence and solitude?
5. What simple prayer can help bring you back from distraction when practicing silence and solitude? Brainstorm together and discuss your answers.
6. Which of the following would be hardest for you to let go of: control, fear, or your perceived identity? Why? How can you overcome this in order to sit in silence and solitude with God?
7. Why is it necessary, as Christians, to come to God with the good, the bad, and the ugly? How can we give space to embrace those situations and emotions before God?

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

Experiencing God requires an awareness of His presence as well as a connection with Him. Over the course of our lifetime, our relationship with Him can deepen when we strive to make this connection stronger. This is how our faith matures.

And on this journey of becoming more and more like Jesus, we should constantly compare ourselves to the example that He set for us. And, in looking at Jesus' example, we can see that He regularly exercised spiritual disciplines – or habits – to connect with His Father. Jesus prayed, He fasted, studied the Scriptures, and practiced solitude, just to name a few. These are all spiritual disciplines that we are expected to practice as well.

Now, maybe you've heard the term 'spiritual disciplines' before. This term 'discipline' usually conjures up some negative feelings - because we might associate that word with punishment or being reprimanded, like the way you would 'discipline' a child after they've done something wrong. But in this context, the word 'discipline' refers to training and dedication to creating good habits. Spiritual disciplines are not about punishment. They're behaviors and activities that equip you to be sustainably engaged in a deepening relationship with God.

In his first letter to Timothy, Apostle Paul compares what we might call "spiritual training" to physical training. In chapter 4 we read, *.....exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come* (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

Now, you might think, "Well, that type of spiritual training is intended for ordained ministers or for 'holy people'". But that's not true. A true follower of Jesus longs to know the heart of God. The psalmist says in chapter 42, that *as the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God* (Psalm 42:1-2). Can we also say that our soul thirsts for God? He created in us a need for connection with Him, but He gives us the free will to choose to love Him or not. If you've made the choice to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and to strive for eternal fellowship with Him, then you need to believe and follow the teachings and example of His Son. In order to be disciples of Jesus, we must be 'disciplined' in His teachings.

Of course, spiritual disciplines can be challenging. They require you to be intentional and exercise self-control. To be a disciple of Jesus requires us to be open to His teaching, and yes, even correction, and thereby transformation.

On their own, spiritual disciplines as an activity or behavior don't transform us. They're not about checking off a list of behaviors so that we can feel satisfied. In other words, spiritual disciplines are not an end, but rather the means.

We don't become godly because we practice spiritual disciplines, but rather, because of the work God does in us when we intentionally create the time and space to connect with Him through spiritual disciplines. Such spiritual habits allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us. The necessary growth and transformation can only happen when our motives are genuine and we sincerely want to connect with God, instead of trying to 'look the part' or wanting to impress our neighbors.

Now, in addition to the disciplines I mentioned at the beginning - including prayer, fasting, scripture, and solitude, there are other disciplines too, such as worship, obedience, service, confession, giving, and meditation. This month, we'll explore the spiritual disciplines of studying scripture, fasting, and silence & solitude. As you consider each of these disciplines, remember that it's not just about the activity itself, but about the attitude and motive with which you approach that discipline.

Spiritual disciplines are not about *doing*, but rather about *being*. So I encourage you to intentionally make time and space to be with God, so that He can transform you to become more like Jesus.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 2: READING SCRIPTURE

Today we're going to look at how we experience the presence of God through reading Scripture. Now, before you think: "Oh great, you want me to memorize the Bible?" No, that's not what this is about. It's about building a great habit that is for *your* benefit.

Maybe you feel you don't know Scripture, or that it's too hard to read. But I suspect you know more than you've given yourself credit for.

For instance, you probably know the phrase: *"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want..."* That's from the 23rd Psalm, one of many beautiful Psalms written by David in Scripture. It's a great reminder that the Lord IS with us and will provide for us.

A favorite Bible verse of mine comes from Proverbs 3, verses 5-6: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths"*. This encourages us that we NEED to trust in the Lord, and not our own ideas. If we openly put Him first, He will direct our lives in the best way.

Now, reading the Bible can seem intimidating. It's a big book. Actually, it's a compilation of 66 books – 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. So, I encourage you to not look at it like other books, where you sit down and read it in one or even a few sittings. In fact, reading it cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation, is likely not the best way to approach it. Since the most important aspect of Scripture is about Jesus, a great place to start is with the 4 Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Now, maybe your thinking: "I have no time for that!" Well...try to add Bible-reading to your life in simple ways. For example, replace a few minutes of checking social media with reading from one of the Gospels for 5 or 10 minutes – or longer! If you're waiting for a train or bus, or maybe for a friend to arrive, pull up a chapter from John on your phone. You can download useful Bible apps, such as BibleGateway or Blue Letter Bible, or even just use your web browser. Whatever form of the Bible you use, reading even just a few verses can change your whole perspective on life.

For example, when you read: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16), consider how much love God truly has for us that He was willing to give up His only Son in order to save us. Or when Jesus said: *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay*

down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13), recognize that Jesus was talking about how much love He has for us!

Scripture was given for us to use. So let's use it! I encourage you to make reading Scripture a daily habit, just like exercise or other positive habits. Even just 5 minutes a day is a good start, and then build up from there. There are many benefits to being intentional about reading Scripture, such as helping you to know God, appreciating His faithfulness to mankind, and seeing God's plan throughout history.

Reading Scripture can also:

- Help us learn about Jesus
- Show us how to love others
- Renew our hope
- And strengthen our faith

Apostle John summed it up well as he completed his account of the Gospel: *"...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."* (John 20:31)

Reading Scripture also connects us to other spiritual disciplines. For example, regarding the discipline of prayer, the 17th chapter of John gives us insight into how Jesus prayed to the Father. We see the importance of oneness, when Jesus prayed: *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me"* (v20-21). We too should pray for oneness, in the same way Jesus prayed for it, because it is truly important!

Another discipline Scripture inspires is worship. A song we often sing called The Lord is my Light comes right from the 27th Psalm: *The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?*

What a powerful way to praise the almighty God who is our light and salvation, and the strength of our life! So, as you practice the habit of reading Scripture in conjunction with other spiritual disciplines, you will discover that the Lord truly loves you, is with you, and wants you with Him for all eternity. That's what it means to experience His presence daily.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 3: PRAYER

In this session we will continue looking at spiritual disciplines, this time focusing in on prayer and how it helps us find spiritual equilibrium when we are feeling unbalanced in our lives.

As a spiritual discipline, prayer is a behavior that increases our spiritual growth and maturity. How does it do this? We see prayer as an essential element of our relationship with God. It is our opportunity to enter into a conversation with Him because we know that in prayer, God is present, He hears us, and He answers us. The more focused time we spend in talking with Him, the more we grow in understanding His will and His plans for our lives, and the more we choose His plans over our own.

Because of Jesus, prayer can also allow us to better understand God's love for us. The relationship between man and God changed fundamentally through Jesus Christ. Christ taught the Jews something completely new about prayer: that prayer is like that of a child who speaks with God as a loving Father in heaven. This also shows us that prayer isn't just a one-way street, but rather is a dialogue we have with God, where we express not only our concerns, but also our praise and thanks. In prayer, we have the opportunity to feel the Father's love for us as His children when we are open with our hearts and our adoration of Him. This love fills us with a complete joy that we cannot find anywhere on this earth, and it gives us a rock to hold onto in any storm we may experience. The security we gain through knowing God's love can bring us to a place of spiritual equilibrium, a spiritual state of calm and rest during times where the earthly and divine influences in our lives are unbalanced or in opposition.

We can look at one of David's psalms and discover how, through his conversation with God in prayer, he is moved to a place of spiritual equilibrium. The third psalm was written as a response when David fled from his son, Absalom. Let's read it together:

Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God." But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill. I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people (Psalm 3).

From David's words, we can see the great earthly stress he is under: his enemies, who want to take away his crown and kill him, are growing in number and are mocking him that he will have no help from God. And yet, David is firm in his knowledge and experience of God's love. His prayer to God reveals this and helps him overcome any fears he may have because of his situation. David calls the Lord his shield, knowing that God's love for His children protects them. David then speaks of his past actions and God's response: David cried out to God and knew he was heard by God, David laid down and experienced that God had sustained him during his sleep. Reflecting on God's presence in his life through his prayer and understanding that he knew God's love, David discovers that he does not have to be afraid of his enemies, that God will protect him and bless him because that was what He had always done.

The power of prayer assured David of God's love for him and brought balance back into his life during moments of fear and uncertainty. We can also be assured of the same thing when we pray to our God. We may not experience the same actionable response from God that David did, such as striking down his enemies, but with guidance from the Holy Spirit, we will experience the love of God and His Son.

We can turn to God again and again, throughout the course of the day, to feel His nearness and find balance again in our lives. We can firmly believe that He hears us in prayer. And when He does not respond in the expected way, we remain assured that in His love, He guides everything for good for those who love Him.

Prayer is a necessary part of our faith. When we come to God to express our love and reverence, and allow the Holy Spirit to influence our prayers, we are open to His truth for our lives, that we may always be secure and rested in the knowledge that He loves us perfectly.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 4: WORSHIP

When we hear the word “worship” we may think of music and its various styles, or perhaps the window of time specifically before the start of a divine service that is to prepare us for word and sacrament. While these are both examples of worship, our understanding of worship cannot be limited to just music or a time slot on Sunday mornings. When used as a verb, “worship” is defined as ‘to show reverence and adoration for’. Our catechism explains that only God is worthy of worship. Only He is to be served. The forms of worshipping God in the old covenant are various. The Psalms attest that praise and adoration come to expression in prayer. The sacrificial service in the temple was also a form of worship.

In John, chapter 4, Jesus, having seen that worship had become ritualistic and purely external, said to the woman at the well, *“...the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”* (John 4:23-34). Thus the proper worship of God is not just a formal act, but rather consists of a person’s complete devotion to God.

One of the most evident avenues of this devotion is our conversation. In the recent Pentecost service, we were challenged to think about our speech. Can others recognize that we are children of God by our language? Not just the words we use, but the tone, context, and intention of what we say? How do we speak about the past? Do we see the good gifts we have received from God and worship Him by thanking Him for His provision in our lives? What about the present? When we speak about the situations and circumstances of our lives in the present, can people see and hear that our absolute priority is fellowship with Jesus? And the future, is our language and speech about the future reflective of our hope and trust in God? We have a great opportunity, and holy responsibility, to worship God through our language and speech.

Worship is our response to God and our expression of what He means to us. In addition to our conversations and speech, we can worship God through our actions. You may remember our yearly theme about Glorifying God, specifically through our behavior. Our daily words and behavior can express worship to God. Worship is a spiritual discipline because it requires intentionality and focus on our part. There is a fine line though. While disciplines help create patterns of behavior, the discipline and pattern itself is not the goal. The goal of a spiritual discipline is to be intentional and set aside time, space, and focus to connect with God and allow Him to transform us.

Think of a farmer. All that a farmer can do is provide the right conditions to grow a crop, he can’t force the seed to grow. Jesus spoke about the right conditions for seeds to grow in His parable of the sower in Matthew 13. In the parable, the only seeds that produced a crop were the ones that fell on the good soil, not the ones that fell among the stones or the weeds, or the thorns. Spiritual disciplines help cultivate us and get our souls to a place where they can be changed and strengthened by Him.

There will always be things to fill up our time like Netflix, or even positive things like family time. Again, those aren’t bad and we especially encourage building and strengthening relationships among families and those around you. However, please don’t neglect the time that your soul needs to be in a place where God can do amazing things. This coming month, set up a plan to intentionally and strategically make the time and space to dive deeper into scripture, allow God to speak with you in prayer, and find new ways to worship God in your daily routine, both in your words and in your behavior.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 5: FASTING

In this session, we'll continue learning about spiritual disciplines, focusing on the discipline of fasting. Now, this is not a term we talk much about, so let's look at it a little deeper.

To fast means to voluntarily go without eating, or some other regular activity such as a hobby or social media, for the sake of a spiritual purpose.

In Scripture, we find many instances of fasting in both the Old and New Testaments. Here, fasting often took on the form of abstaining from food, and it was a practice used for a variety of spiritual purposes. For instance, the king of Nineveh and his people fasted and prayed to repent (Jonah 3:5-10). The prophetess, Anna, fasted to worship God (Luke 2:37). Paul and Barnabas fasted to seek God's wisdom for newly appointed leaders in the church (Acts 14:23). And Jesus fasted in the wilderness to prepare Himself to do His Father's work (Matthew 3:16 – 4:4). In each of these examples, these people looked to God for something and used fasting as a way to intentionally focus on Him.

Now, we might ask ourselves: are we commanded to fast? Nowhere in the Bible does it explicitly say that Christians are required to fast. But if we look at Jesus' teachings, and His own example of fasting, we can see that He has an expectation that His disciples will fast at some point. He understood fasting as a practice that His followers can use in their lives to refocus on God.

Jesus even talked with the disciples about fasting. In Matthew chapter 6, He says to them, *Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting... But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly* (Matthew 6:16-18).

You see, the Pharisees often made it a point to make their fasting known to others so they would be seen as pious. But in this teaching, Jesus tells His disciples that when they fast, they should not call attention to themselves - and this applies to us, too. If we make the decision to fast in our own lives, it must always be centered on God. He is our primary reason for fasting.

A similar teaching about fasting the right way can be found in Isaiah 58. In this chapter, the people questioned why their suffering, and abstaining from food, didn't attract God's

attention. Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells the people He does not accept their fast. They believed that their fasting made them look like obedient believers, but God knew their fasting didn't change them. While they fasted and believed they were acting righteously, they were still persisting in their old ways – they did whatever they desired whether it was right or wrong; they exploited their servants; they fought with one another; and they didn't feed the hungry or offer shelter to those who needed it. Their fasting had no spiritual effect on them. God didn't need the people to fast for the sake of upholding the law – His purpose for their fast was to serve others, to go out and do something. But instead, they fasted to get what they wanted and to look good in God's eyes. Their focus wasn't on glorifying God, but glorifying themselves.

Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the eyes of God. Yes, we may feel a little pain or discomfort over what we've chosen to give up, but it's not just about skipping meals or deciding to take a break from social media – fasting has a deeper purpose. It is an intentional action done to better your relationship with God.

During our fasting, we strive to inwardly be in constant prayer, worship, and adoration of God. This brings our focus to Him and helps us to fast in a way that pleases God. It's an opportunity to look at things and people the way God sees them. It's an opportunity to stop dwelling on our own needs or pleasures, and instead, be sincere in our conversations, help others, and give cheerfully.

Whatever we abstain from when fasting, we replace it with actions dedicated to God. When you fast in this way, you don't have to feel miserable over what you've given up, but rather you can experience great joy because you know that God sustains you and secures your future. Interestingly, it says in Isaiah 58 that God promised His people that if they fasted properly, He would guide them and be delighted in them, and they would be the foundation for many generations. Isn't that wonderful? God also makes these promises to us for our future when we glorify Him in our fasting.

So, any time we explore passages in the Bible that involve food, or fasting from food, we can be reminded of Jesus. In the Gospel of John, chapter 6, He tells the disciples, *I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst* (John 6:35). Of course, Jesus isn't talking about never having to eat food again so our body can live. He's talking about everlasting life. He's talking about the presence of God and our ability to have a relationship with

Him. In society, we are constantly being enticed to satisfy our appetites and desires. And yet, this might just be why we need to fast in our lives. Our fasting – whether it is from food, hobbies, technology, or something else – reveals the things that control us. Are those things earthly or heavenly? During a fast, we choose to put the earthly things aside and come closer to God. When we dwell in His presence, He becomes the most important focus in our lives. He is all we need. We are fully satisfied by Him. So, when you fast, you can be reminded of what is truly essential in your life – an eternal relationship with the Triune God.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 6: SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

...but the Lord was not in the wind...the Lord was not in the earthquake...[and] the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice (1 Kings 19:1-19).

Welcome! In this last session, we're going to talk about the disciplines of solitude and silence. The Bible verse that I just read is taken from 1 Kings, chapter 19 – the account of Elijah going into the wilderness and up to Mount Horeb to experience the presence of God. But, Elijah is not the only example of solitude and silence in the Bible. In the New Testament we often read of Jesus going off by Himself to pray and seek God's guidance (Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46, Luke 6:12, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16).

So, how can solitude and silence have a place in our lives? What purpose do they serve besides time for prayer? And who has time to sit in silence anyways?

Let's begin by considering this discipline in a very practical way. How would you actually practice this in your daily life?

To engage in the disciplines of solitude and silence, first, find a sacred space, a place set apart for God. This is not only a physical space, but also a **time** set apart for God. Next, decide ahead how much time you will spend in silence. Remember, the amount of time is not as important as the regularity. Pay attention to your body; sit in a comfortable, yet alert, position. Use a simple prayer that expresses your desire for God's presence, such as "Here I am, Lord." This phrase will help bring you back from distraction.

Solitude and silence, like all other disciplines, don't require "more" of our time – they require intention and practice. If you were given 2 more hours in a day, chances are that you would fill it up with the same things you fill the other 24 hours with. To practice solitude is **to choose to be alone and do nothing**, to give up accomplishment. And silence completes it. Until we enter quietness, the world around us still commands our attention and distracts us.

This can be a very difficult thing to do in a society that demands productivity and achievement. But in solitude, we are free from human demands and can focus on God, in whom we want to live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28).

To practice solitude and silence, we have to let go. Psalm 46, verse 10 reads, *Be still and know that I am God...* The Hebrew word for "be still" literally means to "let go of your grip." So what are you gripping that you need to let go of?

Maybe it's **control**: Perhaps we think that if we walk away from everything going on in our family or at work for just 15 minutes, it will all fall apart. Can we accept the fact that we are not indispensable? Can we trust God with our lives enough to disconnect?

Another might be **fear**. Does the thought of sitting alone in complete silence intimidate you? Solitude and silence are frightening because when we strip everything else away, we are very vulnerable in that moment. When I cut off everything going on in the world, and I sit in silence and solitude, it's just God and me. And in that quiet, what if it turns out that there is actually very little between God and me? Perhaps we fear that God will not show up in our quiet time. We need to let go of our fears and realize that in these moments, we are simply accepting what God offers us. We have to let go of trying to use our efforts and instead receive what God wants to give us, placing ourselves at the mercy of His time.

We must also let go of our **perceived identity** – the way that we define ourselves by our roles and responsibilities. The question is, who are you when you're doing nothing? How would you describe yourself if you couldn't reference your job, your school, your hobbies, or your family relationships? In solitude and silence, we can't run back to the distractions of our lives that make us believe that we are worth something in our own eyes, or in the eyes of others. In solitude and silence, our old self dies and the new life that we have in Christ becomes clearer. Who does GOD say that I am?

Okay, once we let go of all of these things, what happens in solitude and silence?

We **notice what is true**. If we return briefly to Elijah in the wilderness, it says that he collapsed under a broom tree and slept. Then an angel woke him and told him to eat, to gain strength for the journey ahead. When we've left behind our distractions and sit in silence what do we notice about ourselves? Are we weary? Are we coming to meet God in moments of joy or grief? When God asked Elijah what he was doing in the wilderness, Elijah told God exactly where he was in life - the good, the bad, and the ugly - when he said: *I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life (1 Kings 19:10).* Can you relate?

Sometimes we need to see ourselves for who we are and name it in the presence of God. Then, in silence and solitude,

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[illegible][illegible]