

“SEEK SOLITUDE”

One morning a farmer told his wife that he was going out to pick the ripe produce from his field. He got off to an early start so he could warm up the truck. He needed more gas in the truck, so he went to get some more gas, but on the way he noticed the pigs weren't fed. So, he proceeded to the corn crib, where he found some sacks of feed. Beside the sacks were potatoes that were sprouting. Then when he started for the potato pit, he passed the wood pile and remembered that his wife wanted wood in the house. As he picked up a few sticks, a baby chick passed by. It had gotten out of the coop, so he dropped the wood and picked up the chick.

When noon arrived, the frustrated farmer had not even gotten to the truck, let alone to the field. By now, it is very hot. Some ripe produce in the field had spoiled.

Have you ever intended to do something you knew was important, but found yourself distracted by many other things that seemed important?

God guided Paul to write for us in the Bible, ***“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”*** Colossians 3:2 But, let's face it. That's hard to do. It's hard to set our minds on God and growing in our relationship with Him because there are so many earthly, temporary things that demand our attention.

I think its even harder today than it was a few decades ago. There is so much more information coming at us every day, distracting us from our main objective, distracting us from setting our minds on things above.

Not only is there more information we have to deal with every day, but the number of decisions we are asked to make each day has just exploded! For example, coffee used to be a choice between regular or decaf. Now a cup of coffee has become a \$5 half-caff, extra whipped cream mocha latte, or a Triple Caramel Threat—cold brew with caramel syrup, vanilla sweet cold foam blended with dark caramel and caramel drizzle. No wonder the lines at coffee shops are so long. The complexity of the drinks people ask for is lengthening lines and driving baristas nuts. Starbucks

says in addition to the drink options listed on its menu boards, there are 170,000-plus ways baristas can customize beverages.

So many decisions each day. So much information each day. How can we focus on God and His Word – His love letter – to us?

A family was visiting Sequoia National Park in California. The highlight there is seeing the Giant Sequoia redwoods, after which the park is named. These trees are awe-inspiring, both for their beauty and their size. The largest redwood in the national park is the General Sherman tree, which towers above the forest at 275 feet in height. It is also 25 feet in diameter, with an estimated age over 2500 years.

As this family was looking up, awe-inspired, there, next to them was a teenaged boy walking along with his family. His eyes were transfixed, not by the trees, but rather by his smartphone. He was engaged in something that demanded his full attention. He never once lifted his eyes to gaze upon some of the most beautiful and astounding of God's creations.

I confess there are times when I am like the boy. I can get so wrapped up in whatever is demanding my attention that I neglect the beauty of God's creation. Spiritually, this is what's happening for many of us. We are letting and giving permission for a lot of things into our lives. Saying "Yes" to a lot of good things. But there's so much we let in of this world that it can become very easy to miss out on the best. And the best is God.

Today we look at the 4th keystone habit of Jesus, which is **seeking solitude**. Jesus frequently did this. Jesus had a lot of people around Him. They came with huge needs for healing of a sickness, or teaching, and sometimes for food. People demanded a lot from Jesus, but Jesus always found this beautiful balance of when to be around people, and also significant times when it was just Him and God.

Let's see how Jesus practiced solitude. Let's turn to Mark chapter 1. A lot happens here. Jesus begins His ministry, then right away starts preaching the good news. Next, He starts calling His disciples, and they start following Him. Then He goes into the synagogue and began to teach. He taught so well that the people

were amazed. As He's teaching, a man starts yelling at Jesus...and this isn't someone saying like "Preach it Jesus." No this is a man who is demon possessed. Jesus orders the demon to come out of the man. The demon convulses the man and a loud demonic voice cries out. Then it's gone. The people are amazed. The words spreads quickly through the whole region about this amazing show of God's power and love.

Then Jesus goes directly to Peter's house. Jesus heals Pete's mother-in-law. Then after that, after it's already been a long, long day and the sun has gone down, ***"people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons."*** *Mark 1: 32-34*

Wow...that's quite a day! If I had a day like that, I'd plan on sleeping in the next day, wouldn't you?. But take a look at what Jesus does: ***"Rising 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*

What did Jesus do? He got alone time with God because He knew in order to do His work, He needed to be in touch with God. He prayed. He talked with God.

This was just one instance where Jesus sought solitude. In the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John there are 39 different times in which Jesus practiced or taught on the importance of seeking solitude.

He spent 40 days alone in the wilderness with God His Father before He began His 3-year ministry that would lead Him to the cross. Jesus would seek solitude before making decisions like choosing who would be His 12 disciples. Jesus He would seek solitude in the middle of His work, and then He would even seek solitude to recharge after the work was completed. He spent time in solitude grieving His cousin and friend John the Baptizer after John was killed for his faith. Jesus spent time alone with God His Father before going to and enduring the cross.

So, looking at Jesus, there are 3 truths that we see:

1. Solitude is not about being alone, but being alone with God.

Solitude, by definition, is the state or situation of being alone. But God didn't create us and wire us inside to be alone. In our prison system, often the worst punishment an inmate can go through is called solitary confinement.

In Minneapolis, Minnesota there is a place called Orfield Laboratory, which has the Guinness World Record for the "quietest room in the world." The room is actually at -9 decibels so when you get in that room you can actually hear your heart beat and the blood flowing through your body. Usually after just a couple of minutes in that room people start going crazy and can't wait to get out. The longest anyone has ever been in that room is 45 minutes.

We have a hard time being silent, don't we? We are made for relationship. You aren't meant to be alone. It's not good for you. God created you for relationship. The greatest relationship, the best relationship you were made for is you and God. So, when I speak of solitude, especially in the life of Jesus, it wasn't so He could be alone. It was so that He could be alone **with God**. Solitude is about being alone **with God**.

When Jesus is in solitude, what is he doing? He's praying. He's talking to God. He goes to places that allow Him to shut down the noise of this world so that He can talk with God.

James 4:8 says: "**Come near to God and He will come near to you.**" God speaks to us when we draw near to Him. We do not have an unapproachable God, but rather a loving God Who loves to be with us. You are a child of the Living God and God loves His children. He loves you. He wants to spend time with you.

Solitude is not about being alone. It's not about being by yourself. That's dangerous. It's about being **with God**. And this is really the greatest opportunity we have in this world.

In fact, the only time anyone was ever truly alone in this world, do you know when it was? It was Jesus Christ hanging on the cross, and crying out to the Father, "**why have you forsaken me,**" as all the separation and punishment we deserve for our sins was carried by Him on the cross. He went through this separation and

complete loneliness so that you and I never had to feel alone and could always be in relationship with God.

We all spend time alone. Are you spending that time alone with the things of this world or with God? God invites you be in real relationship with Him. There's nothing in this world that can compare to being with God.

2.Solitude is not about clearing our minds, but filling our minds with God.

Every day is a battle for what we allow into our minds. People, companies, clubs, advertisers, organizations all fight for that mind space of yours every single day. Some try to come up with catchy slogans to make sure that your brain remembers them. And our minds just get bombarded and bombarded and bombarded. My question to you is what are you allowing in?

We are living in a very loud, distracting world. The average person checks their phone 80 times per day and the average Millennial is closer to 150 times. Some actually can't go to the bathroom without it! In 20 years, diagnoses for ADHD has nearly doubled.

Have you ever said something like "I just need to clear my mind." Sometimes in our day when we get really busy, when we have a lot going on, when we are constantly hurried, we just want to escape. I'm sure I've said it before.

God didn't make you to clear your mind. He created you to be a creative, mindful person. It's not about clearing your mind, it's about filling your mind with the right things. In the Bible, Philippians 4:8 says: ***Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.***

While we aren't called to empty our minds, you do need times turning the noise and distraction down. The demands of this fast-paced, pressure-packed world can be very great. And if you are not careful, you can let so many good things into your world, that you miss out on the best thing which is Him.

God still speaks today. Many of us don't hear His voice because we don't turn the noise of the world down. God speaks. The problem isn't that God isn't speaking. It's that we are not listening.

The problem isn't that we can't listen. It's that we are listening to everything else. You likely won't hear God if you never turn the noise of this world down.

Psalm 46:10 says, "**Be still and know that I am God.**" You want to know God? Be still. He still speaks today.

3.Solitude will not make you less productive, but more productive.

This is why most of us don't practice solitude, right? We've got things to do. Stuff to get to. I can't slow down because then I won't get it all done.

If we look at the life of Jesus, I don't think anyone could argue against this fact: He was the most productive human being ever to live. And Jesus often took time away to be alone with God in solitude.

Why does solitude with God make you more productive? Because once you've spent time in relationship with God, once He's filled your mind, you know what you leave with? Focus!

Solitude brings focus in a loud, distracting world. And focus brings productivity. When I know what I need to do, I can get it done. It's often times when I don't know what to do that I'm the most unproductive.

Careerbuilder did a survey and found 75% of employers say two or more hour a day are lost in productivity because employees are distracted. That's crazy. That's a lot of work hours and a lot of expense for employers to lose out on because of distractions.

Even Jesus tells us the importance of staying connected to Him to ultimately bear fruit and be productive. Jesus said, ***⁴Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.***

⁵"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 14:4-5

Remain, remain, remain. Other translations say “Abide.” The key to your productivity in this world is abiding in God. Productivity is not more of you, but more of God.

Did you know that God could do more in one second than you could do in your entire lifetime? When we give over the things of this world to Him, when we spend time in His presence...he fills our minds with more of Him and He allows us to be more productive.

So, here’s what I want to challenge you with. This week, spend time in solitude. Get alone to be emptied of the hurriedness of life. Be emptied of your ceaseless knee-jerk need to go, go, go, do, do, do. Instead, be still and be filled with God.

· If you have to work this week, and you have a busy week, then seek solitude with God before you engage in work and things become fast and crazy. · If you have a medical appointment this week and you’re concerned about it, then get alone with God before the procedure or visit happens. · If there is someone you intend to talk to, you have an issue, or a need, or a problem you want to talk over with someone, then spend time quiet with God before that conversation. Be filled with Him, His wisdom, and His grace before words come out of your mouth. · If you have a big decision to make this week, then solitude with God will help you hear His guiding voice on which direction you should choose. · If there is something you need to do this week and you just don’t feel you have the strength in you to do it. You feel weak, then come into God’s presence and let Him strengthen you.

Your heavenly Father loves you and longs to be with you. He wants to affirm you as His beloved child, clean your heart and mind with His grace, and fill you with His hope.

Seek solitude. Amen.