

This week's material is based around resources provided by Bridgeton Church and Donald Whitney

ICE BREAKER:

Pop Quiz! From the lyrics below name the song and the artists who sang it

People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dare
Disturb the sound of silence

ENCOUNTER: Silence and Solitude

Gather together as a life group. Say a prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence, even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a life group, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and *through* each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

FOCUS: Mark 6/ Luke 4 and Luke 5

Q How as a group would you define silence and solitude?

Q How does the idea of silence and solitude make you feel? Excited? Scared? Too busy?

Q Read Mark 6:31. Do you receive enough physical and spiritual rest? What steps can you take to have time alone with God to restore you body and spirit?

Q Read Luke 4v42 and another person read Luke 5v15-16. Talk about the following questions:

A Why do think Jesus would regularly slip away to "lonely places"?

B What role do you think the regular practice of silence and solitude played in Jesus' emotional health and spiritual life?

C What challenges would Jesus have faced to carve out time to be alone with himself and God? Do you face any similar challenges?

ACTIVATION:

Here's the practice for the coming week: First...

1. Identify a time/place that works well for you

- Time: For most people, first thing in the morning works best. You're rested, fresh, and the day is young. For others, a more optimal time slot is when kids are napping in the late morning, or on a lunch break, after work, or before you go to bed. Feel free to experiment until you find the right fit.

- Place: Find a place that is quiet and as distraction free as possible. A comfortable chair with a blanket and candle nearby works well for a lot of people. Weather permitting, a park or nature reserve are also a good bet.

2. Set a modest goal

- Beginners: It's better to start small and work your way up. We recommend you start with ten minutes, 3-5 days a week.
- Intermediate: If you already practice silence and solitude a few times a week, consider upping it to every day.
- Advanced: If you already practice silence and solitude daily, consider upping your time (to, say, an hour), or just giving your time a high level of focus.

Then, for the practice...

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable

- For most people, sitting with your back straight, shoulders relaxed, legs on the floor is a good start. Others do better lying on their back in a relaxed position.
- Some of you may prefer to do this exercise while walking or doing something simple with your hands, like laundry or drawing.

2. Begin with a breathing prayer

- Close your eyes.
- Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
- Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just "watch" your breath go in and out.
- Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
- Your mind *will* seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do's, and distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recenter with a quick prayer, like, "Father..." and come back to your breathing. (A wee practice I have used for years is when breathing in I think "you are here God" and when breathing out I think "I am here", Mark)
- In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.

3. Spend a few minutes "abiding in the vine"

- Transition from your breathing prayer to "the practice of the presence of God."
- Notice God's presence all around you, *in* you. For some people it's helpful to imagine the Father is sitting in the chair across from you or on a throne.
- Welcome his love, joy, and peace from the Holy Spirit.

- If you want, open your mind and imagination to listen for God's voice, or get something off your chest in prayer.
- But the main goal here is simply to "be with Jesus." Don't feel like you have to "do" anything. Just relax and enjoy his presence.

4. Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit the rest of your day to the Father

A few things to note:

1. You can't "succeed" or "fail" at this practice. All you can do is show up. *Be patient*. This takes some people years to master. Resist the urge to say, "I'm bad at this" or "This isn't for me." Don't judge yourself, especially if you're an overachiever type.
 2. If you're more of an "S" on the Meyer's Briggs, and sitting still is just death, you might want to try this while doing a stretching exercise or going on a walk somewhere quiet and distraction free (like a park or short hike). Apply the same idea to a walking prayer, and just focus on your walking instead of your breathing.
- **Work through these discussion questions (10-15 minutes)**
 1. How does the idea of a breathing prayer hit you? Does it sound appealing? Stupid? Uncomfortable?
 2. What challenges do you face in carving out time for silence and solitude? (Ex. Overall busyness, work schedule, little kids, apartment living, extroverted personality, etc.)
 3. What is your deepest fear and greatest hope for this coming week's practice?