

Four suggestions for how to enter into Solitude and Silence

Read Psalm 37 and see what David shows us about trusting, waiting, depending and being still – learning to trust, learning to wait, learning to depend, learning to be still are important aspects of learning to benefit from solitude and silence. We are not seeking emptiness. We are seeking the Lord.

1. Be with God.

Instead of working on our Bible study or planning our next women's event, put down your "to do" list and walk away. Intend to focus this time on being with the Lord. "Waiting on God and being still is not a tiresome ordeal for the super-holy. It is full of interaction with God. We can look forward to it with expectant alertness."¹ Spend time being in the Word, simply "wasting" time interacting with God.

"In solitude, we voluntarily abstain from our normal patterns of activity and interaction with people for a time in order to discover *that our strength and well-being come from God alone*. 'Solitude,' writes Louis Bouyer, "serves to crack open and burst apart the shell of our superficial securities." In experiences of solitude, we gently press into the Holy of Holies, where we are sifted in the stillness. Painfully, we let go of vain images of ourselves in charge of everything and everybody. Slowly, we loosen our grip on all those projects that to us seem so significant. Gently, we become more focused and simplified."²

There is a lot to be learned from setting aside our agenda and intentionally *being* with God.

2. Quiet the inner noise and enter into his rest.

Moses exhorts the people to be quiet and listen.

Deut 27:9 Then Moses and the Levitical priests addressed all Israel as follows: "O Israel, be quiet and listen! Today you have become the people of the LORD your God."³

Be quiet and listen! We say this to our children all of the time. Now as adults we need to say it to ourselves. As we come away for a personal retreat, the "work" of the first several hours is to silence the inner noise—that hyperactive inner voice that continually reminds us of what we need to do back home or a concern we need to worry about. If the reminder is important, write it down.

¹ Jan Johnson, *Solitude and Silence IVP Bible Study*, 2003, p. 24

² Richard Foster, *Prayer*, p. 100-01

³*Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. 1997 . Tyndale House: Wheaton, Ill.

Once your mind knows you won't forget, it will stop interrupting you. Some have found that it's helpful to pray, calling on the name of Jesus, out loud, to ask him to silence the inner noise.

Even though we signed up to come away, we can find ourselves anxious about being alone—worrying about what our experience will be like this time. Our anxiety can keep us mentally preoccupied when we want to be internally quiet and at peace. *Will God meet us here? Will we hear his voice? Will he provide the direction I need?* I'd like to encourage you to write down your worries and bring them to the Lord. *Here I am, Lord. Here's what's on my mind.* We don't know what the Lord will do in our lives at this retreat. But we do know that he is able—he is able to come so near to us that we fall on our face trembling. He's able to speak loud enough for us to hear. We can relax. Worrying about our experience can be the very distraction that prevents us from entering in.

We might also experience resistance, *“How long do I have to do this?” “I'm not a solitary person. I need to talk. I need some noise.”* Acknowledge your inner resistance and bring it to the Lord—it might be a starting point for you.

You might also find you're really tired, falling asleep when you want to pray. It's fine to take a nap. Elijah needed to rest before he could hear the Lord and so may we. Give yourself permission to relax, to rest, to sleep. You'll be able to enter into the presence of God and focus on intentionally listening—but it may take some time, maybe a nap, or a walk, and some intentional effort as you begin.

3. Set your heart and mind on Christ.

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” (Col 3: 1-2)

Seek to lift your thoughts from thinking about our every day things to focus instead on spiritual truths, on Christ, his power and majesty, his character and goodness, his everlasting love. Recognizing the unfathomable greatness of God and our humility before him and let it lead you to worship and adore God. Be mindful of his majesty, experience his love, commune with him in prayer without having to say any words. Simply adore him.

I found my heart and mind drawn into adoration quite by surprise. One morning I began copying Isaiah into a blank book simply because I felt like it. I wasn't preparing a talk or writing an article. I began simply copying Isaiah on a whim. Morning after morning I was drawn to continue copying and he gave me a glimpse of his majesty. I had no words to articulate what I was experiencing. It was a brush with the glory of God and I was silenced, in awe as I beheld the Lord. You might want to copy a passage or spend time reflecting on the Lord—considering his character and what he has done in your life.

4. Consider where your heart is before the Lord.

Read Habakkuk. Open your heart to a time of confession before Jesus. Habakkuk is silenced, in awe of the majesty of God, as he waits for God to deliver. I've learned a lot from him.

Hab 2:18 “What have you gained by worshiping all your man-made idols? How foolish to trust in something made by your own hands! What fools you are to believe such lies! ¹⁹ How terrible it will be for you who beg lifeless wooden idols to save you. You ask speechless stone images to tell you what to do. Can an idol speak for God? They may be overlaid with gold and silver, but they are lifeless inside. ²⁰ But the LORD is in his holy Temple. Let all the earth be silent before him.”

Spend time in confession bringing anything to him that is not right between you and the Lord, or you and other people, or attitudes just within yourself that aren't right.

Progress in intimacy with God means progress toward silence. “My soul finds rest in God alone,” declares the Psalmist (Ps. 62:1). Let us be filled with reverence in his presence, quieted and at rest, adoring his majesty in intimate worship, forgiven, loved, silent, in awe.

Network of Evangelical Women in Ministry
10004 Cork Oak Circle
Oakdale, CA 95361
World Wide Web: www.newim.org
E-mail: info@newim.org

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