

## Notes on Solitude

- Jesus calls us from loneliness to solitude.
- We are scared of silence (think about how often you turn on a radio, television, etc the minute you wake up, or get in the car)
- Henri Nouwen has noted that “without solitude it is virtually impossible to lead a spiritual life.”
- “We can cultivate an inner solitude and silence that sets us free from loneliness and fear.”
- “Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment.”
- Solitude is more than a state of mind and heart, it is a place that we go (a place that can be physical or not and it can be maintained at all times)
- “It is quite possible to be a desert hermit and never experience solitude. But if we possess inward solitude we do not fear being alone, for we know that we are not alone. Neither do we fear being with others, for they do not control us. In the midst of noise and confusion we are settled into a deep inner silence. Whether alone or among people we always carry with us a portable sanctuary of the heart. Inward solitude has outward manifestations. There is the freedom to be alone, not in order to be away from people but in order to better hear the Divine Whisper better.”
- Seeking out a solitary place was a regular practice of Jesus’ and should then become a regular practice of ours. (see: Matt 4:1-11, Matt 14:23, Matt 17:1-9, Matt 26:36-46, Mark 1:35, Mark 6:31, Luke 5:16 among others)
- We must learn to be alone with God, not just with others in community. The ability to do one helps us to offer more to the other.
- Individual solitude brings value to the whole community of faith.
- Solitude and silence are almost inter-changeable
- **“Without silence there is no solitude.”**
- Silence sometimes requires the absence of speech and always requires listening.
- “Simply to refrain from talking, without a heart listening to God, is not silence.”
- “A day filled with noise and voices can be a day of silence, if the noises become for us the echo of the presence of God, if the voices are, for us, messages and solicitations of God. When we speak of ourselves and are filled with ourselves, we leave silence behind. When we repeat the intimate words of God that he has left within us, our silence remains intact.” -Catherine de Haecck Doherty
- “It is easier to be silent altogether than to speak with moderation.” -Thomas a Kempis
- James 3:1-12 controlling of the tongue
- The Quakers often ask a question that is good for all of us, “Can I improve upon the silence?”
- “Silence is one of the deepest Disciplines of the Spirit simply because it puts a stopper on all self-justification.”
- “To take seriously the Discipline of solitude will mean that at some point or points along the pilgrimage we will enter what St. John of the Cross vividly describes as “the dark night of the soul.” The “dark night” to which he calls us is not something bad or

destructive. On the contrary, it is an experience to be welcomed much as a sick person might welcome a surgery that promises health and well-being. The purpose of the darkness is not to punish or to afflict us. It is to set us free. It is a divine appointment, a privileged opportunity to draw close to the divine Center...What does the dark night of the soul involve? We may have a sense of dryness, aloneness, even lostness. Any overdependence on the emotional life is stripped away. The notion, often heard today, that such experiences should be avoided and that we always should live in peace, comfort, joy, and celebration only betrays the fact that much contemporary experience is surface slush. The dark night is one of the ways God brings us into hush, a stillness so that he may work an inner transformation upon the soul."

- "When God lovingly draws us into a dark night of the soul, there is often a temptation to seek release from it and to blame everyone for our inner dullness. The preacher is such a bore. The hymn singing is too weak. The worship service is so dull. We may begin to look around for another church or experience to give us "spiritual goosebumps." This is a serious mistake. Recognize the dark night for what it is. Be grateful that God is lovingly drawing you away from every distraction so that you can see him clearly. Rather than chafing and fighting, become still and wait."
- "To enter solitude, we must disregard what others think of us. Who will understand this call to aloneness? Even our closest friends will see it as a terrible waste of precious time and as rather selfish and self-centered. But, oh, what liberty is released in our hearts when we let go of the opinions of others! The less we are mesmerized by human voices, the more we are able to hear the divine Voice. The less we are bound by other's expectations, the more we are open to God's expectations. But, in solitude, we die not only to others but also to ourselves. To be sure, at first we thought solitude was a way to recharge our batteries in order to enter life's many competitions with new vigor and strength. In time, however, we found that solitude did not give us power to win the rat race; on the contrary, it taught us to ignore the struggle altogether. Slowly, we found ourselves letting go of our inner compulsions to win and our frantic effort to attain. In the stillness, our false, busy selves were unmasked and seen for the imposters they truly were. It is out of our liberation from others and self that our ears become open to hear and our eyes unveiled to see the goodness of God. We can love God because we do not have to love the world. Through our solitude, an open inner space has been created through which God finds us. In solitude, we experience a second (and third, and fourth, and fifth...) conversion. In a deeper more profound way, we turn from the idols of the marketplace to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God takes this "useless" Discipline, this "wasted time," to make us His friend. "

#### Steps into Solitude

1. Take advantage of the "little solitudes" that fill our day
  - a. Before the family wakes up
  - b. A quiet car during your commute
  - c. Coffee alone
2. Find or develop a "quiet place" for silence and solitude

- a. Designate a space in your house
  3. Live an entire day with no speaking
  4. Four times per year reorient your life goals
    - a. Do it in 3-4 hours
    - b. Think about what you want in 1, 5, or 10 years to have accomplished
    - c. Listen for God's prompting (not just the idea that I want to have more money, a better car, a promotion...rather, learn pottery or painting...read all of CS Lewis...help a person per week...start a non-profit...
- "Like Jesus, we must go away from people so that we can be truly present when we are with people."
  - "The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others."

\*All quotes unless noted are from Richard Foster